

The Living Shakespeare

Edited by
ROBERT GITTINGS

Heinemann

David Daiches
John F. Danby
Richard David
Bonamy Dobrée
Tyrone Guthrie
Leslie Hotson

L. C. Knights
Michael MacOwan
Helen Morris
M. R. Ridley
C. J. Sisson
Margaret Webster
J. Dover Wilson

THE LIVING SHAKESPEARE

THE ESSAYS in this volume represent some of the latest thoughts of many of the living experts on Shakespeare, both in the study and on the stage. They are closely based on a recent series of talks given under the same title on the B.B.C., and also broadcast on various other radio networks all over the world.

They were originally provoked by the wide and lively demand to know more about Shakespeare—his life, his work, and the whole accumulated experience of well over 300 years of appreciation and speculation since his death in 1616. The essays cover nearly every aspect of his work, and nearly every one of his works is at least mentioned in them; many plays, indeed, are dealt with in detail with a considerable extent of quotation.

The studies, however, are general, and though specialist points are made, this is always done within a framework designed for the general reader. The book gives, in fact, the ideal short guide to Shakespeare as he appears in the light of modern scholarship and criticism.

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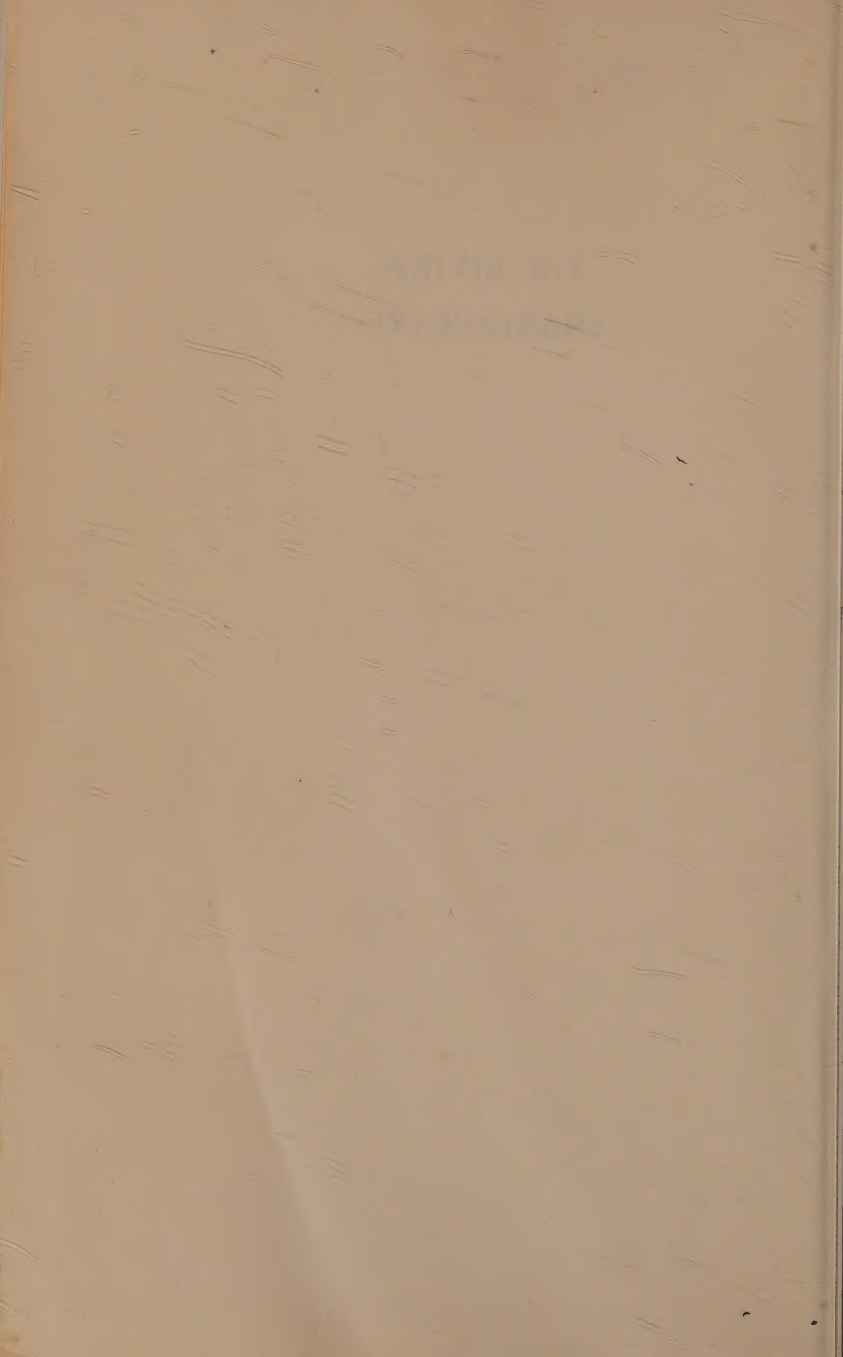
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THE LIVING
SHAKESPEARE



THE LIVING SHAKESPEARE

edited by

ROBERT GITTINGS



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Foreword

THE essays in this volume are closely based on a series of talks given under the same title on Network Three of the British Broadcasting Corporation. These talks, in their turn, were originated by the Transcription Service of the BBC's Overseas Service, to meet the wide demand throughout the world for an authoritative yet popular survey of Shakespearian study. The thanks and acknowledgements of editor and publisher are due in the first instance to the members of Transcription Service, who were so closely associated with the original talks, and secondly to the Further Education Department of the Talks Division of the BBC, which was responsible for the talks first being heard in this country. Neither these essays nor their final transference to book-form would have been possible without the most generous co-operation of these sections of the BBC. I must also thank for his enthusiasm and skill the co-producer of the talks, John Allen of the School Broadcasting Department, BBC.

The text used generally is that of the Oxford Standard edition (edited by W. J. Craig), but other texts and textual readings have been used when so desired by the contributors.

R. G.

Introduction

ROBERT GITTINGS

THESE essays represent some of the latest thoughts of many of the living experts on Shakespeare, both in the study and on the stage. They were originally provoked by the wide and lively demand, from all over the world, to know more about Shakespeare—his life, his work, and the whole accumulated experience of well over 300 years of appreciation and speculation since his death in 1616. The essays cover nearly every aspect of his work, and nearly every one of his works is at least mentioned in them; many plays, indeed, are dealt with in detail with a considerable extent of quotation. The studies, however, are general, and though specialist points are made, this is always done within a framework designed for the general reader. The contributors have produced a survey which, it is hoped, will prove both popular and exact. To aid this, the following introduction is provided, which is intended both to indicate and to comment upon the themes which the various contributors have treated, in the order in which they are here printed.

* * *

William Shakespeare was born (1564) at a time of crisis and change in English history and life. Queen Elizabeth had only just made a satisfactory settlement of Church and State after the troubled reigns of her brother and sister, Edward VI and Mary. In foreign politics, the great and hostile power of Spain dominated Europe and the West. On the other hand, exploration and trade had opened wider vistas to England, and the enclosures for sheep-farming, described in Sir Thomas

More's *Utopia*, had begun to alter her basic economy and much of the pattern of her rural life, while a primitive form of the factory system had begun to appear.

Against a background of old and new, tradition and change, Shakespeare appeared. He is associated with the lively changes in language, many of which he helped to create, but on the whole he was a traditionalist in thought, as became his country background. His chief power was his wide human sympathy with all the multiform types of life round him in the crowded and intense society of the Elizabethan world. One of his other great contributions is his mastery of stagecraft. Through and with him, the English theatre rose from simple morality or knockabout farce to rival the great tragic and comic productions of classical Greece.

We too live in a swiftly-changing age, and it is to such an age that Shakespeare's steadily-human values may specially appeal. As Margaret Webster says: 'The reality of Shakespeare's people is what has made them last three hundred and fifty years. The cardboard figure and the manufactured joke do not last three hundred and fifty days.'

The essential facts of Shakespeare's life are well-known. Most of the mysteries about him have been created by people who think that the life as well as the work of a man of genius should be mysterious. Yet there is still much to find out about him—his everyday working life, where he lived, who were his companions. The ordinary life of most people is hard to follow: only when they are mentioned in legal or public documents is there any certainty. These latter are the chief hunting-ground of the present-day Shakespearean biographer. Patient search among documents in the Public Record Office, London, and in other collections of Elizabethan material has revealed, for example, exactly who was mine Host of the Mermaid Tavern in Bread Street, where

Shakespeare drank and talked with Ben Jonson and his companions; Shakespeare is discovered unexpectedly as named in a law suit concerning the Swan Play House in London, and so on. From such glimpses of Shakespeare the man, in Elizabethan life, as Dr. Hotson says, 'the priceless gain is increased understanding of the poetry Shakespeare wrote in terms of that life.'

The arguments about the exact nature of the Elizabethan stage, for which Shakespeare wrote, will possibly go on for a long time. There are, however, some facts of which we can be sure. The stage was in every way different from ours. It was a platform rather than what we think of as a stage, and it was more or less in the middle of the audience, instead of being withdrawn behind an arch, called a proscenium, which was introduced in the seventeenth century, and has remained in our theatre ever since. On Shakespeare's stage, then, his plays were acted in a much closer connection with the audience than we can possibly imagine. They did not attempt to be realistic or to use scenery, and therefore they were free to use every device, of which poetry was the chief, to arouse and stimulate the audience's imagination.

The first uniform edition of Shakespeare's plays, the *Folio*, was published after his death and without his supervision. Some of the plays had, however, been published in quarto format during his life. These were either pirated editions ('bad' quartos) or, more often, editions put out by his company to forestall or correct the bad quartos. The modern editor of Shakespeare has to choose between the often widely-differing readings, errors, and omissions of these texts, and sometimes to hazard a reading of his own. In this way, he is brought into amazingly close contact with what Shakespeare actually wrote, and how he wrote it. 'And so,' concludes Dr. Dover Wilson, 'when anybody asks me "Why

do you edit Shakespeare?" I answer, "I do it because it gives me happiness!"

Shakespeare is such a universal genius, that we are apt to forget that he has an individual poetic style as a poet, quite apart from his skill as a playwright or his insight as a man. This style, of course, matures and alters through the years, but it remains his own, and distinct from anyone else's. If one were to take an 'average' Shakespearean style, it is perhaps most clearly shown in his best-known (and longest) play, *Hamlet*, and in those 'sugared sonnets', which he wrote for his private friends, and which were not published, and then probably without his consent, until late in his life. Dr. Daiches takes one of these sonnets—"No longer mourn for me when I am dead"—and a passage from *Hamlet* to illustrate the special qualities of Shakespeare's poetic style.

'Until recently, "shape" would have been the last quality most people would have expected to find in a play of Shakespeare; for Shakespeare, they thought, was the great undisciplined genius, his work full of individual splendours but as a whole sprawling, untidy, shapeless. . . .' The more practical modern approach to staging Shakespeare's plays has, however, revealed what masterpieces of stagecraft they are, and how not only each play, but each scene has a shape of its own. Sometimes the pattern is elaborate, as with the two parallel plots in *King Lear*, sometimes simple as in the early comedies. There is a more static pattern in comedy, and a more dynamic in tragedy. Shakespeare is a master at mixing the different elements in his plot, as in *Henry IV Part I*, where the three main groups—the King, the rebels, and the Falstaff-Prince Hal group—gradually draw together into what for Elizabethan audiences was the climax of the play, the battle of Shrewsbury.

For about three hundred years after he wrote, it is fair to

say that people were disturbed and puzzled by the bold and striking imagery of Shakespeare's poetry. The Restoration England of Charles II and Pepys found violent and vulgar such expressions as 'the blanket of the dark' in *Macbeth*, and substituted its own more refined versions. These changes were still applauded a hundred years later by such eighteenth-century critics as the great Dr. Johnson, who wrote, with scorn, 'who . . . can hear of the avengers of guilt peeping through a blanket?' The Romantic revival of the early nineteenth-century brought some change of attitude, but the strong meat of much Shakespearean imagery often made the Victorian writer uneasy. Only in our own century has it been properly appreciated, and only recently has it been properly studied.

Professor Knights, taking his examples too from *Macbeth*, demonstrates the truth that 'in Shakespeare above all, imagery isn't just decoration or the poetical dressing-up of something that could be just as well expressed in plain prose.' Images in Shakespeare are not merely fanciful. They are a way of expressing the truth so that it has a profound effect on the mind. In fact, they are the *only* way that certain deep truths can be expressed. 'The blanket of the dark' is not only a metaphor: it conveys the moral darkness that overwhelms the souls of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Their crime puts them literally 'in the dark' about ordinary life.

'Plot versus character—which is the more important in drama?' For Shakespeare the problem hardly existed. Plot was character, and his chief interest was the interaction of all sorts and species of men and women. The smallest character was allowed his say in the plot, and often in very memorable lines of poetry too. Shakespeare was interested—and so interests us—in what sort of people his characters were. At the same time, he had to satisfy an audience which liked

plot and action. His attempts to do this are most clearly seen in the tragedies, and it is perhaps in *Othello* that he most obviously succeeds in all respects. All the plays, however, have the quality of never letting the characters get swamped by the plot. Equally the main structure of a strong plot is almost always made clear at every turn to the audience.

The producer—a comparatively modern innovation, as opposed to the old actor-manager, such as Irving or Benson—now dominates our ideas of the staging of Shakespeare. The influence of people such as William Poel and Gordon Craig at the beginning of this century is still strongly felt. Generally, however, this has meant not an elaborate but a much more simple style of producing Shakespeare—in modern dress, for instance, or in a single adaptable setting. Moreover, the recent war has brought fresh ideas and new conditions into production. Many of our present ideas owe something at least to productions for troops or civilians in halls, huts, and aircraft hangars all over the world. At the same time, the modern architects have been busy to give us the perfect theatre, which in many instances has been more like Shakespeare's stage than anything for the past 350 years. Tyrone Guthrie speaks with the voice of experience and experiment: very often, in theatrical production, and particularly as applied to Shakespeare, these turn out to be remarkably the same thing.

The main characteristic of Shakespeare's comedies is their freshness of treatment. The materials of his plots are often stock and conventional—mistaken identity, disguises and so on—and are frequently drawn from obvious traditional sources, such as the figures from Italian comedy who appear in *Love's Labour's Lost* or *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the early comedies too there is a conventional type of comic word-play, such as the punning between the two servants in

The Two Gentlemen of Verona. He uses or parodies the fashionable 'Euphuism' of Lyly and the 'Arcadianism' of Sir Philip Sidney.

Yet all these forms are given depth and originality by his own individual treatment, especially when we reach the mature comedies of the turn of the century or thereabouts. Rosalind in her pastoral setting is really in love; true feeling breaks through the delicate prose-style, and is enhanced by it. Viola in *Twelfth Night* feels genuine joy at finding that the brother she so much resembles is alive. Even the clowns, fools and zanies become real people, sometimes even more so than the main characters. They are perhaps the best example of the way Shakespeare lifted comedy from the realms of mere slapstick into what we mean by the term today.

Historical drama with us is apt to mean 'costume drama, something placed in a remote or unfamiliar setting and time. Elizabethan audiences took a very different view. History plays to them were real and topical. They also taught lessons, not only about the past but about the present. Shakespeare's *Richard II* was actually put on for a special performance by those who wished to show that a monarch could be deposed. The censorship in those times was vigilant for passages in historical plays which had dangerous political implications. The position of such plays was something like that of opera in the time of the Italian risorgimento.

Historical plays, then, were expected to point a political moral, generally the dependence of all things upon order, or 'degree'. As with comedy, Shakespeare's early Histories show this in a cruder form which gives way to a deeper and more subtle treatment. They also excel in depth and variety of character-drawing, and it is no accident that Shakespeare's greatest comic character, Falstaff, occurs in them. Yet even Falstaff is part of a moral story. For all his ingenious comic

devices, which endeared him to audiences of Shakespeare's time, it was felt right that he should be removed in the interest of good rule rather than continue his reign of misrule.

Shakespeare's tragedies have been regarded as representing a mood or a period of darkness in his life; but tragic art does not emerge from anything as simple or as temporary as a 'mood'. Tragedy deals with reality, with the facts of existence. In our present age, when the pressures of reality touch the existence of everyone, we have some chance of knowing the problems that Shakespeare faced in these tragedies. Although the themes of tragedy are eternal, they cannot be conceived or appreciated except by men who feel them, as Keats said, 'on their pulses'.

Hamlet may be thought of as Shakespeare's great quarry for tragedy, out of which he hewed much material for his later work and much that remained in an unfinished state. For all its multiform greatness, *Hamlet* does not remain finally satisfying. As a work of art it is confusing, as a play too complex, and as an answer to the question 'what does good do when confronted by evil?' it puts the case that good should borrow the methods of evil and try to outwit it. Through perhaps the halfway stage of *Othello*, Shakespeare came to demonstrate that good must at all costs remain good. 'The policy for goodness . . . is to remain patient.'

In recent years an interesting theory was put forward about Shakespeare's Roman plays by the late J. A. K. Thomson. This is that through his reading of North's Plutarch for these plays (excluding his violent Senecan first tragedy *Titus Andronicus*), Shakespeare came in contact with the older Greek ideas of tragedy, embodied by Plutarch in his treatment of Roman historical figures, just as Thucydides had embodied them in his own history of the Greeks themselves. This gives *Julius Caesar* a special place as the first

of the major tragedies (excluding again the romantic tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*), providing the ideas of Hubris and destiny which make the great tragedies such as *King Lear* comparable with those of Aeschylus and the Greek tragedians.

Whether or not Shakespeare overcame his traditional 'less Greek' in this way, it seems certain that his 'little Latin'—perhaps more than he has often been allowed in the past—predisposed him to Roman tragedy, 'the high Roman fashion' adopted by Cleopatra the Egyptian for her own end in the face of the power of Rome. It is the union of this high tragedy with some of his greatest poetry that produces the most remarkable of all his plays, *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is the one play, in which, for all we know of Shakespeare's genius, we are perpetually surprised by it: here and there we almost feel that Shakespeare was surprised by himself, as the huge sweep of the play developed. The battle of Actium, which gets a major place in Chaucer's treatment of the same theme, is almost brushed aside in the mounting tragedy of the lovers, and the pull of Egypt and Rome for Antony's soul.

Shakespeare's late plays—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*—represent a phase of consideration and assessment in Shakespeare's work. They may be looked at in various other ways. The new indoor theatres, the scenic effects which had been made popular by the masques at the court of James I, the rather more free type of verse which was beginning to be used by Beaumont and Fletcher, all these may have had their influence. Yet the motive behind these plays emerges as Shakespeare's desire to look fully at life.

These plays are romances, with romantic fairy-tale plots, and royal or noble children lost and found. For all their romance, however, it would be a mistake to regard this group, as some critics have done, as 'the calm after the storm' in Shakespeare's development. It is utterly wrong, as Professor

Dobrée says, to regard these plays as serene. Evil and violence are there in their grossest forms. Even Prospero owns that Caliban is a part of his own nature—‘ This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine ’. Nor can *The Tempest* be regarded as the ultimate conclusion of this group. In it, Shakespeare is perhaps moving toward themes lying beyond the dominant notes of the other romances, reconciliation and forgiveness. He had reached what we may believe to be the finest form of dramatic verse, but spiritually he was still exploring.

The essays in this book do not deal specifically with the ‘ problems ’ of Shakespeare, those philosophic and personal points where we feel doubts and disturbance about the direction in which Shakespeare’s mind is leading us. These are mainly centred on the poems—the Sonnets in particular—and on some of the least-handled plays, such as *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *All’s Well that Ends Well*, and the comedy which has proved such a Tom-Tiddler’s-ground for biographical theories, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. It is no part of this introduction to range into what has often been a wildly unprofitable field of conjecture. Shakespeare’s artistic achievements remain supreme, ‘ rough-hew them how we will ’. The view may be put forward, however, that there is value in some of these personal investigations, sanely and reasonably (though not necessarily reverently) conducted, and that study of the life of a great creative genius, as distinct from the legends about him, will always result in a stronger appreciation of his work. Such studies, which have exercised a perennial fascination upon scholars and laymen alike, are illuminating in direct proportion as they lead us back to the plays themselves. As Keats, the most Shakespearean of our later poets, has said: ‘ Shakespeare led a life of Allegory: his works are the comments on it.’

Shakespeare in His Time

MARGARET WEBSTER

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE is probably known to more people in the world today than any other Englishman who ever lived. They may not know much about him—the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps; or the line ‘To be or not to be: that is the question’; or a name which has become the synonym for jealousy, Othello. An old woman in a remote Scottish village once told me that she had always thought Shakespeare was another name for God; and a garage attendant in New York asked me—with respect—whether I was, as he had read, ‘the great authority on translating Shakespeare into English.’ Neither of them knew anything about him; but the name evoked a response little short of reverence.

It is surely a very remarkable thing that a humble actor-playwright, who was born in 1564 and died in 1616, should have so seized and held the imagination of the world. Shakespeare himself would certainly have been astounded to know that his name was singled out for immortality. Not that he was especially modest in respect of the power and permanence of his poetry. He once wrote to his beloved:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme—
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.

His friend and fellow-dramatist, Ben Jonson, hailed him as 'the applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!' and proclaimed that 'He was not of an age but for all time.' But this after all was a piece of laudatory verse dedicated to a dead friend whom Jonson had not hesitated to criticise during his lifetime. To his companions, Shakespeare was a good comrade, an exceedingly able and successful dramatist and a shrewd man of business who owned a share in the most prosperous theatre in England. He had earned considerable money, by the standards of the day, and had providently saved enough of it to retire when he was not yet fifty to the new house he had bought himself at Stratford-on-Avon, where he died a few years later in 1616. His comrades grieved for the loss of a good friend, but they had no intimations of his immortality.

It may fairly be said, I think, that Shakespeare was born at the full tide of England's history and that his genius matched the richness of the hour. Perhaps at no other period, before or since, could it have reached such stature. The very air crackled with vitality, with challenge and change. Under the Tudor Kings, and especially under the first Elizabeth, England was emerging as a world power, instead of a barbaric and backward little island, torn by civil war. In 1588, the year after Shakespeare—according to some people—came to London for the first time, the terrible Spanish Armada was defeated. For the first time, England was free from fear. The war dragged on, in France and the Low Countries, but it did little to check the growing national prosperity. Hawkins and Frobisher and Drake crossed uncharted seas; strange people and strange merchandise and even stranger stories flowed into the busy Port of London. The city traders encouraged them all. All the wealth of Europe was to be bought and sold, antic fashions from Italy,

ruffs and farthingales from France, swords of Toledo steel, 'the ice-brook's temper': and there were perfumed spices from Arabia and drowsy syrups from the East—and even the leaf of the tobacco plant, a new importation from the New World. And the young Shakespeare saw these things and talked in the taverns with the men who brought them and caught heady glimpses of adventure and the far horizons.

The frontiers of the mind were expanding too. It was only a hundred years since Caxton had set up at Westminster the first English printing press; and in the intervening period the riches of Renaissance Europe came pouring into England—wealth available for the first time to anyone who could read or beg, borrow or buy a book. Here was the material for all the plays a thousand dramatists could ever hope to write—all of English history, for example, in the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed; all of Greek and Roman history in North's translation of Plutarch's Lives; and a treasure-house of fable and romance in the French, Italian and Spanish tales and stories, still known to everyone in their transfigured form as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Othello* and the rest.

If the raw material of story-telling was changing, so was the English language itself. The pressure of new ideas had burst the resources of common speech and had forced poets and scientists alike to delve back into their own vocabulary and to plunder the speech of other nations. When there was no word available, they invented one. And to this Tom Tiddler's ground of verbal plenty came Shakespeare, the greatest genius of imagery and word-magic who has ever lived; and whatever he picked up turned, in his hands, to gold and silver.

In all this ferment of change and expansion, the theatre and its audiences were changing too. In 1587, or thereabouts,

when young Shakespeare, aged twenty-three, came to London with a company of strolling players, the art and profession of the stage had barely begun to exist. The plays still carried traces of the mediaeval mystery and morality plays from which, in part, they were descended. Comedy was farcical, knock-about stuff, tragedy no more than blood-and-thunder melodrama with no blood spared. The characters were little more than puppets. Scholars and wits were beginning to toy with the theatre, but as a pastime, not a serious art.

The players had been, until very recently, no more than the hired retainers of some powerful nobleman. But now they had begun to maintain themselves, to travel round the country playing at Inn yards or in the great houses or even at Court. Most recently, they had invaded London itself. Here too they played, at first, in the yards of the famous taverns—the ‘Saracen’s Head’ and the ‘Red Lion’ and the ‘Bel Savage’. They found favour with the rowdy, avid town audiences and were much in demand at Court; but the City authorities frowned upon the assemblies they attracted as centres of riot and breeding-places of the plague. Badgered with restrictions and prohibitions, one of the players, James Burbage, took a bold step. He and his company went off to the fields of Shoreditch, outside the City limits, and there erected a building which he called, with simple grandiloquence, *The Theatre*. His example was soon followed, though the centre of activity shifted to the south bank of the River Thames at Southwark. The Theatre became merely *a* theatre.

It was, however, to this building and this company that Shakespeare came—acting a bit, writing a bit and doing any odd job that was needed. For ten years most of his work lay here; and then the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (to which

high status the company had attained) decided to abandon their almost derelict building. The actors arrived one morning with picks and axes, pulled the entire structure apart, and transported it lock, stock and barrel, south of the Thames. There, as the younger Burbages later testified, 'We built the Globe, with more sums of money taken up at interest . . . and to ourselves we joined those deserving men, Shakespeare, Heminge, Condell, Philips and other partners in the profitts of what they call the House.' And a very profitable investment it proved to be.

The Globe was a roofless theatre, with a projecting platform stage, an inner stage, upper balcony and a gallery for the musicians. The most distinguished members of the audience sat on the stage-platform itself, and the 'groundlings' stood around and below it. Here most of Shakespeare's greatest plays were produced, until, in 1613, it burnt down. Later it was re-built; but by this time the company were already using a newer acquisition, the Blackfriars. This was an indoor theatre and the new method of staging which it inaugurated had a notable effect on the elaborate stagecraft of Shakespeare's later plays, such as *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

During this period of evolution the actors had changed too; not so long ago they had been more like our variety and vaudeville entertainers—singers and swordsmen and wrestlers and dancers and acrobats and clowns. These expert skills of the circus they still retained. But they acquired, increasingly, the subtler skills of speaking words and impersonating human beings. The quality of their art was determined, as it always is, by the quality of the plays in which they appeared. The dramatic repertoire of the London companies in Shakespeare's apprentice period was not without excitement and challenge. The "smash hit" of the day

was Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, which is full of the whole bag of contemporary tricks, murder and madness and ghosts and blood-feuds, but it has dramatic vigour and flashes of poetry. It is thought possible that Shakespeare drew the material for *Hamlet* from a lost play by Kyd.

But probably the University-trained wits and poets who were by now writing for the theatre had more to teach him. There was a new fashion in elaborate word-spinning and intricate, intellectual jokes which pleased the players' wealthy patrons, and Shakespeare proves that a grammar-school boy can do it just as brilliantly as a University man, by writing *Love's Labour's Lost*. In fact the dramatist who stands closest to him in the eyes of posterity is a University man, his friend Christopher Marlowe, Marlowe, the dazzling and reckless and doomed who first made great poetry the instrument of drama and got himself killed in a tavern brawl before he was thirty. Shakespeare lived to write a mightier line than Marlowe but never to outgrow his indebtedness.

His early plays stick fairly close to the models at hand. But the true and unfettered Shakespeare flashes suddenly into mastery with the characters of Katherine and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and with that monster of genius, *Richard III*. He has outgrown the straitjacket of imitation and the old materials tingle with a fresh charge of electricity. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, despite all its tedious verbal juggling, Shakespeare comes of age; he wears his youth like a bright cloak, his skill like a plume of feathers and his wit like a silver sword. He is rejoicing, and swaggering, too, more than a little. He is a poet and is proud of that. Then suddenly the poet and the craftsman of plays are fused together in a blaze of creative splendour. Within two years he writes *Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Here is the poet of loving and dying,

and youth above all. Listen. The lovers are parting. Juliet says:

JULIET: Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree;

ROMEO: Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale: Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tip-toe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Now the triumphant march of the plays began—and it continued regular and unbroken in sequence—the comedies, the happy histories, the great tragedies, and last the romantic fantasies. Under Shakespeare's tutelage the drama in England had grown from infancy to maturity; from him it had received the greatest masterpieces it has ever known.

Shakespeare in Our Time

MARGARET WEBSTER

SHAKESPEARE never invented an original story; never, I mean, so far as the main plot of his plays was concerned. He was not unique. A dramatist was not, in those days, judged as much by the novelty of his tale as by the telling of it. And there was such a wealth of history and fable, legend and invention on which to draw—all fairly generously intermingled, so that it was hard to distinguish the fact from the fiction.

The basic stories he uses are good dramatic material—especially on the stage. They move, they have colour and action and glamour; they are never preachy or dull. Of course, the audiences who first saw his plays were the lucky ones. They did not know what would happen after Juliet took the potion, nor that Portia would find in Shylock's bond the fatal flaw which saved Antonio. We know, and cannot therefore find the same excitement. It does not matter; the genuine excitement is different. If Shakespeare had done no more than re-tell, in play form, a number of extant histories and fantasies, he would be no more important than the slave who recounted to the Sultan the thousand legends of the Arabian Nights. Since it has been plausibly contended that he was no very profound philosopher either—wherein does his greatness lie? what makes him, still, so supremely alive?

It is surely that he was gifted, in a unique degree, with the capacity to reflect the thoughts and emotions of a human

mind and heart—impulses common to us all—and to express them in words which are unforgettable and absolute. He took all humanity for his friend. He saw the creature, man, in all his aspects, from 'a poor, bare, fork'd animal' to a god. Here are two views of him—the first, spoken by Edmund in *King Lear*, is a bitter one:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and trecherers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting-on: an admirable evasion of whore-master man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star!

Yet here is Hamlet's view of the human creature—spoken even, from the depths of his personal unhappiness and disgust:

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

Though very few of Shakespeare's major characters could stand as models for all the virtues, there are equally few among his enormous gallery of portraits whom he does not treat with understanding and therefore with compassion. Even when he laughs at them he does it, most often, with affection; and that is why in growing to know Shakespeare we also grow in knowledge of the human heart. To laugh with Falstaff is to participate in a new dimension of laughter; to have suffered with Othello must be, for ever after, to share the sufferings of other men.

The reach of Shakespeare's mind was incredible; he could put himself inside the skin of every type of human being, from Caliban, the primitive near-animal, to little Verges, the parish Sexton, 'honest as the skin between his brows'; from Iago, the villain dedicated to the pursuit of evil, to Cleopatra, Egypt's Queen, of whom he wrote the famous phrase 'age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.' He did not dissect them; he *was* them; and he spoke for them in phrases and images which are such perfect music and so precisely matched to their object that we ourselves feel them to be the inevitable expression of our own thoughts.

Read his verse aloud—for that is what he wrote it for. His prose too—you will notice that both the speeches that have just been quoted are in prose. But you will find the passion of Shakespeare in the music as well as in the meaning of his lines. In the theatre, which is his true home, you will hear at once how the sheer sound of what is being said stirs the blood. Here, for instance, is Viola, telling Olivia what she would do to arouse her love:

Make me a willow-cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud, even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me!

It is not, in fact, a very practical programme; but the seduction of the love-music achieves its own end.

Do not be led to despise words. Language is power. We habitually neglect our own, and use no more than an impoverished remnant of its magnificent resources. Whether,

as a scientist or a lawyer, you need the precision of words; whether you have to use them as an artist or a statesman—you will be the richer and the abler if you have taken possession of the language which is your free heritage. I think it was at the age of seven or so that I first realised the enormous pleasure given me by the beginnings of a Shakespearean vocabulary. My mother had been reading me bits from *Richard III*—she believed in starting young! The following day at school, in an access of rage with the arithmetic teacher, I arose in my seat and addressed her as an ‘elvish-mark’d abortive, rooting hog.’ The consequences were disastrous, but it was worth it.

Do not approach Shakespeare’s writing expecting it to be terribly difficult. It isn’t. There are, of course, a good many words which have passed out of common usage and many more which have changed their meaning. You will need a glossary—I do, to this day. But don’t necessarily try for the dictionary meaning of each syllable. Let the rhythm and the feel of it soak into you. Seek always the truth, the reality. ‘To be or not to be’ is one of the simplest speeches ever written; but if you read it as if you had never heard of it before, and really think into it, you will find that it says, in effect, what almost everyone in the world has thought for themselves at one time or another—the unanswered questions about the difference between being and not being; how precious a gift is life even at its worst; and how profound a mystery the ‘sleep of death’, the ‘undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns’.

Seek the reality in Shakespeare’s people—Brutus, for example, the ‘confused liberal’ of our day, struggling to make up his mind whether the use of force ever achieves anything, whether even tyranny and oppression justify murder. Falstaff is not just a fat and greedy old ruffian who drinks

inordinate quantities of an unfamiliar liquor called 'sack', but the greatest de-bunker of all time. Hear him demolishing the romantic concept of 'honour', or, with splendid rhetoric, justifying the virtues of alcohol—there is nothing dated about speeches like that. Even the little comics in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not just clowns falling over their feet and mixing up the lines and generally making fools of themselves before the Duke. They are honest little tradesmen, trying with all their might to produce a piece of amateur theatricals which will please their great patron—bursting with anxiety to do it right and terribly in earnest. They are real people and consequently one can feel *with* them and not simply laugh at them. The reality of Shakespeare's people is what has made them last three hundred and fifty years. The cardboard figure and the manufactured joke do not last three hundred and fifty days.

All these things are, evidently, most apparent in the theatre itself. The plays were written to be acted—really acted, by live actors to live audiences. Then only, when the words put on flesh and become incandescent do they reach their full glory. Because Shakespeare had learnt his craft from the beginning and was a supreme theatre-magician, he knew how to make things and people come alive on the stage that may seem complicated or flat on the printed page. He wrote, as a rule, against a dead-line and he could be hurried and careless in matters of detail. Shaw once said in exasperation 'Oh, what a DAMNED fool Shakespeare was!' But he was never a fool about people or about what you could do in a theatre, given the right actors, to set alight that spark of electric excitement which can leap from the stage to the audience and set the whole building ablaze.

He was never a fool about actors either. He knew what makes for good acting. The 'advice to the Players' which

he puts into the mouth of Hamlet has yet to be improved upon for brevity and good sense. And, not unnaturally, his plays have been continuously performed in every country in the world and under every possible set of conditions. They have been done in gracious theatres like the Comédie Française and in steel-and-concrete auditoriums seating six thousand people; they have been played in tents and Cathedrals and tin huts; on mountain-sides and football grounds and battlefields. The locale doesn't matter; even the scenery—or lack of it—doesn't matter very much, despite many passionate theories to the contrary. What the plays do need, imperatively, is actors—actors who can speak the verse and interpret their author's meaning with generosity and truth.

See the plays, if you can. Play them, if you can. It won't matter if you do not play them very well. There is no other way by which you can get to know them so intimately or enjoy them so much. Either way, you will have a surprising amount of fun. Shakespeare in the theatre is a source of universal wealth. Everyone can draw from it—the poet, the philosopher, the business man or the lorry driver. Each will take from the plays as much as his mind and heart will carry, just as everyone concerned in producing or acting them will bring to their service all he has, and find it fully absorbed.

Once, in America, I talked with a group of college students who had been watching a performance of *Hamlet*. They were a very enthusiastic audience, and I asked them what had appealed to them most. One said it was the sound of the words themselves, another the colour and glamour and pictorial drama, a third, the excitement of the story itself, the fights and the thrill of action; but the fourth expressed a different point of view. 'It's funny,' he said, 'but while

you're there you don't think—you forget about everything. But when you come away, you realise you've been through something—something that's made a difference—an experience.'

This, I think, has been true for several hundred years, and is likely to remain so. Shakespeare has been, for the English-speaking peoples, the voice of hope and love and laughter; he has comforted our griefs and spoken our triumphs with the sound of trumpets. He is beyond the divisions and barriers of contention, for there is singularly little hatred in his plays and infinite understanding. It would be a barren, bloodless world indeed which ever felt it had outgrown his wisdom and compassion.

I envy those of you who may be setting out on a voyage of discovery in Shakespeare's world. Some of you, I think, will return to the plays many times and will find that you are continuously enriched by them, as I have been. And when you close the book, or when the final curtain falls, you may perhaps hear the lingering echoes of Shakespeare's own farewell:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on: and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The Man Shakespeare

LESLIE HOTSON

How did it happen that a life of the great Shakespeare was not written by somebody who knew him? The answer is that literary biography as we know it was not practised in those days. It's well known that his contemporaries venerated Edmund Spenser as the Virgil of the age, but not one of them thought to jot down a memoir of him. Baffled here, for facts about Shakespeare posterity has been driven to hunt through the surviving records. Having spent a large part of my life on that hunt, I know how difficult it is, but also how fascinating, rewarding, and thrilling too.

On the whole it has been astonishingly successful. Consider the external frame of a biography: parentage, baptism, marriage, children, career, achievements, last will or testament, death, burial. Now in the case of Spenser, who was far more famous in the sixteenth century than Shakespeare, we don't know who his parents were, where or when he was baptized, and no will has been found. And the great tragic poet John Webster left far fewer traces even than Spenser did. For anyone itching to make a sordid mystery or a monstrous fraud out of an Elizabethan dramatist's life, Webster is the man to choose not Shakespeare; for in Shakespeare's case every item in that list of external facts is not only known, but documented.

William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford-on-Avon on April 26th, 1564. No Weird Sister was at the font to tell

the sponsors that only sixty-six years in the future a printed book would refer to Stratford as 'a Towne most remarkable for the birth of famous *William Shakespeare*.' Those sponsors could see no more in the infant in arms than the third child and eldest son of John Shakespeare and his wife Mary Arden. The Ardens were gentry, and John Shakespeare became eminent enough to be granted a coat of arms. He owned houses, was in business as a glover, traded in wool, and rose to be mayor of the town.

Stratford's schoolmaster, as highly paid as a contemporary Oxford professor, taught the universal language of scholarship and diplomacy, Latin—which is also the best training for the mastery of English. Will Shakespeare's friend Richard Quiney has left a letter in Latin, written at the age of eleven. On finishing school, these boys knew far more Latin than most modern university students. Acting Latin plays was a common exercise for Elizabethan schoolboys, and excellent companies of players frequently visited Stratford and the neighbouring Warwick.

What of Shakespeare's other schoolfellows? One of them, Richard Field, became a prominent publisher in London, and printed Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, his first poem. And I was interested to turn up the careers of two others, both named Smith. One Smith took a B.A. at Oxford and became a schoolmaster near London. The other Smith learned Russian, and spent many years in far-off Muscovy as a trader.

Among such enterprising Stratfordians, we are not surprised to find the young dramatic genius quick to enter on life's second act. At the early age of eighteen he secured a licence to marry Anne Hathaway. She bore him three children in a little over two years: first Susanna, then, early in 1585, the twins Hamnet and Judith.

Since our next undisputed record of Shakespeare (after his twins' baptism) is dated London 1592, romantics have styled the interim his 'lost years'. Well, whoever lost those seven years, it was certainly not Shakespeare. For this London reference betrays the envy of the dying dramatist Robert Greene at the success of the actor Shakespeare in writing such epic dramas as *Henry VI*. Greene angrily refers to him as a 'Shake-scene' who fancies himself a universal genius. And this is not all; for Henry Chettle the writer, promptly apologising in print for having published Greene's attack, speaks not merely of the 'honest and civil' Shakespeare's excellence in acting, but also of the recognition by reputable judges of 'his facetious grace in writing that approves his art'. By 1592, then, at the age of twenty-eight, Shakespeare had already established three reputations. In his profession of acting he was a master; among judicious readers he had made a name for writing with art and grace; and as a playwright he had grown so important as to arouse the leaders' envy. Certainly this was an extraordinary record of achievement within a few years.

We know where Shakespeare lived in London. First, at the north end, in Bishopsgate, near the two earliest playhouses in England, where he acted and where his first plays were produced—the Theatre, built by the Burbages, and the Curtain. I have recently identified the only known contemporary picture of the Curtain Playhouse, where *Romeo and Juliet* was first performed. Later he moved south of the Thames to the Bankside, convenient to the newer Swan, and to the Globe in which he shared as owner with the Burbages. Having torn down the original theatre in the fields north of the city, they built the Globe in part from its timbers. Later still we see the player-dramatist lodging in

London's northwest quarter, near his friends and colleagues Heminges and Condell, who preserved his plays and after his death published them in gratitude to his memory. We also find him investing in house-property in Blackfriars, close to his company's winter theatre, and making his friend William Johnson, the host of the Mermaid Tavern, his trustee in the purchase.

Shakespeare's company of actors, under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, rose to be the best in England, and was most frequently commanded to play before the Queen. They owed a main part of this success to the unequalled dramas which their Shakespeare provided. When King James came to the throne he took this company under royal patronage, attaching them to his household. And when the King granted them red cloth to wear at his ceremonial entry into London, Shakespeare's name headed the list. Extremely fond of the drama, James greatly increased the frequency of their performances at Court.

Although Shakespeare published his two narrative poems, and permitted some of his plays to be printed, others were brought out in mangled form by piratical publishers. And plays in which he had no hand at all were published as 'by William Shakespeare'—a commercial proof of the prestige of his name.

Finally, after his reign as acknowledged king of the London stage, we follow Shakespeare in retirement to Stratford—so wealthy that he had meanwhile purchased lands and the finest house in the town for a residence. Here in his fifty-second year he made his will. He remembered with legacies not only Stratford friends but his fellow-actors Heminges, Burbage, and Condell. A month later he died, survived by his widow and his two daughters.

Most of these facts have long been known; but the

external biography of Shakespeare is still growing. Within the last fifty years further discoveries have been made, chiefly in the judicial archives of the Public Record Office in London. Here Professor C. W. Wallace found new details of Shakespeare's company at the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres; and here too some years later I ran down another new episode in the poet's career, connecting him with the Swan Playhouse—which is the only Elizabethan theatre of which we have a contemporary sketch from within, showing the stage. While some background is lacking, the documents recovered make it perfectly clear that in 1596 Shakespeare, together with Francis Langley, builder and owner of the new Swan, was involved in a quarrel with William Gardiner, a local Justice of the Peace, rich, rascally and old, and Gardiner's insignificant stepson William Wayte. Threats and insults were exchanged. Striking similarities lead me to believe that Shakespeare smilingly satirized this precious pair of opponents in the Justice Shallow and Abraham Slender of his *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives*.

But perhaps the most personal interest attaches to Wallace's discovery, in a lawsuit of 1612, of signed testimony by Shakespeare. Previously we had only five signatures, all later and inferior; for two were cramped on narrow parchment labels, and the three on the will at the close of life were all very shakily traced. The new one, by contrast, was rapidly dashed on an ample sheet, and so strongly that the *k* is badly blotted: it's clearly the hand of a practised and fluent writer. Shakespeare's evidence shows that in London he had been a valued lodger in the household of Christopher Mountjoy, an artist-craftsman, who, as I have found, fashioned head-dresses of gold thread and jewels not only for ladies, but also on occasion for the Queen herself. And Shakespeare had taken so friendly an interest in their affairs as to have

furthered a marriage between the daughter and the chief apprentice.

In studying Shakespeare's will I noticed that the friend he appointed to see that his last wishes were carried out, a certain Thomas Russell, esquire, highest in social rank of all those included in the will, was still unidentified. On search, this friend proved to be a landed gentleman and sportsman of ancient lineage, intimate with courtiers and wits. Mr. Russell had married the wealthy widow of England's leading astronomer, Thomas Digges, a fellow-parishioner of Heminges and Condell in London, and brought her and his stepchildren to live at his manor near Stratford. One of these children, Leonard Digges, became a man of letters at Oxford, and joined Ben Jonson in hailing the memory of 'our Shakespeare' in the posthumous publication of his plays. He assures the poet that

... when Time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
... every line, each verse,

Here shall revive, redeem thee from thy hearse.

Digges's expressions are warm, intimate:

... the glad remembrance I must love
Of never-dying Shakespeare.

This warmth is understandable, now that we know he grew up close to the great man, his stepfather, Russell's neighbour and friend.

Discovery has given us a richer view of Shakespeare's actual circle, and sudden bright glimpses of the poet himself in it. Eagerly, gratefully we seize and savour every fresh connection, each new-recovered detail. We look for more, and more will be found. But from all this searching and travelling in Elizabethan life the priceless gain is increased understanding of the poetry Shakespeare wrote in terms of

that life. Or to put it in another way, if we try to read Shakespeare without a familiarity with the circumstances and the thought of his world, we shall continually be misreading him.

Of Shakespeare's character, of what he was like personally, the external facts can tell us little. Nevertheless that character is perfectly well known. For it could neither remain hidden from his intimates nor fail to shine through his writings: 'the book is the man'. If in his pages we are drawn irresistibly to Shakespeare, if we find him not merely deeply understanding and humorous, but lovable, we do no more than repeat the experience of those who lived with him. For them he was marked above all as 'gentle Shakespeare'—the great gentleman. His rival Ben Jonson, that penetrating, severe, and jealous critic and artist, testified, 'He was honest, and of an open and free nature. I lov'd the man.' More than that, he gave the verdict on his genius which posterity and the whole world approves. Shakespeare, he declared, ranks with the greatest of all ages. His work will live for ever. And yet, Jonson insists, that universal eminence cannot take him away from his contemporaries: he is ours, the essential Elizabethan:

Soul of the age!

The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!

Shakespeare's Theatre

MICHAEL MACOWAN

To understand and enjoy any author's work we have in a way to get back into his mind. And in approaching the plays of Shakespeare, something written to be acted, one has to think how it was he thought they were going to be acted when he wrote them. The point of course is that his stage, his theatre, or his ideas even of plays, were very different from our stage, our theatre and our ideas of plays. This is not always very apparent to many people when they are reading the plays. So it's very useful to take a look at the kind of building that he knew his plays were going to be acted in.

It was a large octagonal building and there were three galleries running right round the sides of it. At one end occupying one side, there was a tall building which was called the tiring house, what we would call backstage. About 9 or 10 feet perhaps from the floor of this, there was a gallery, with rails, perhaps curtains along it, and under the gallery there was a space making a recess, or inner stage about 10 or 12 feet wide by 8 feet deep. Then at either side of this tiring house building there were doors giving on to the stage. Those filled in the next two sides of the octagon, so that the back of the stage really occupied three sides of the octagon.

The stage itself was a huge platform, and it is not easy for us used to a modern stage to realise just how big and how spacious it was. Probably from side to side, that is from the downstage side of the two doors on either side, it was about

40 feet across, and from the front of the inner stage, the recess, it was about 35 feet to the edge of the platform. The rather interesting feature of it is that the edge of the platform, the very front of the stage, must have come almost exactly into the middle of the whole building, into the middle of the octagon, so that you can see that a large part of the audience were seated round the stage. The space on the floor that wasn't occupied by the stage was known as the yard, and there probably people were not seated; they just stood or sat on the ground. The galleries, of course, were reserved for the best seats, the nobles and the people who could pay most, and they were nicely separated from the hoi-polloi in the yard. Now the whole thing was open to the air except the galleries which were roofed in, and the centre main area of the stage above which was a canopy. This canopy was probably painted with sun, moon, the stars, and represented the heavens, and it was known in theatrical parlance as 'the heavens'. You know the way one likes to give names to different parts of a building. Well, they called the canopy over the stage 'the heavens', and the space which must have existed under the platform they called 'the hell', and there was almost certainly a trap-door in the stage from which you could come up from below. You can see the implications that if the canopy above is the heavens, the space underneath the hell, then the stage itself in a sense represents the earth.

You can see that on a stage like this, theatrical illusion as we think of it simply didn't exist. And this gave the dramatist the most tremendous freedom. First of all it freed him from the tyranny of where the action was supposed to be taking place. There was no such thing as the beginning and end of a scene: when one scene was over it simply meant that one lot of characters cleared off the stage, and instantly the new lot of characters came on, so that there was

absolutely continuous flowing action. When it was important to know where it was taking place it was always made quite clear, because the characters told us where they were. When it didn't matter they didn't refer to it, and very often, you know, it doesn't matter as much as we think it does.

The Elizabethan dramatist didn't bother much about time either. His audience hadn't got a programme which said 'Act I, Scene I, A morning in June', 'Act I, Scene II, A month later'. Once more, when time mattered to the play, the characters referred to it, and when it didn't they simply left it out. This freedom from time gave the Elizabethan dramatist the possibility of a much larger sweep of action than any modern dramatist has the chance of. In fact, it was really more like the film: it had that same large narrative flow which we can achieve in films today. This was fortunate because the Elizabethans liked to see large events happening in their theatre. They were interested in big matters.

The audience were not so much drawn into the play as we are drawn in through the proscenium on to the stage in a modern theatre. They were given a bird's-eye view, or I would really like to say, a god's-eye view, of the course of the action and it's interesting that so many of them, all that mattered, were seated above the stage and looked down on to it.

But perhaps the most important possibility which this stage gave to Shakespeare, and which he took full advantage of, was the possibility of writing on more than one plane at the same time. I mean the plane of the ordinary events of life, simply what happens, and perfectly concrete events too, and at the same time operating on the plane of pure poetry, of those ideas which one can call poetic ideas, not only poetry in that it's written in verse and that it is poetry in language,

but that it's poetic in feeling, making an impact on our emotions about which we can't think, and which is really something quite apart from just the events themselves. It's a commonplace in the theatre that people are often rather disappointed when they go to see *King Lear*. They have heard that this is perhaps the height of Shakespeare's poetic tragic achievement and yet when they come out, well, perhaps they think there is something wrong with them, that they don't seem to have got as much out of it as they expected. The difficulty, I think, with *King Lear* is that it is particularly one of these plays that operates on two levels. There is a perfectly clear story: in some ways it's a sad story and there are certain things about it that I think are a bit foolish as a story, but of course its roots lie pretty deep. It is a fairy story and it means a good deal more than just the events that take place in it. And this one never seems to see or very very rarely in the modern theatre, and I believe that's simply because in the modern theatre one has got to have scenery of some kind.

Now for Shakespeare in his Elizabethan theatre there was no such difficulty because as no place was represented, it was simply a platform on which people acted. He could move from one plane to the other or be operating on both levels at the same time without anybody knowing what was being done to them and yet it was most effectively being done to them.

It might be useful to have an illustration of the way in which the plays come alive when one thinks of them in terms of the stage for which they were written. I tried the experiment once of working out with a group of students the course of action of *Macbeth* on a model of the Globe Theatre stage. We tried to plan all the entrances and exits, which doors they used, which part of the stage was used for which

scene, when the recess was used and so on. When we came to the great scene of the murder of Duncan, we made what I think is a very interesting discovery. You remember that after Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have killed Duncan they hear a knocking on the door, which is some other people arriving at the castle in the early hours of the morning, and they decide they must make a hurried exit and go to bed so that they are not discovered to have been up all night. Well now, throughout this scene one of the doors has been the door that they have gone through to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth to take the daggers back and so on. That uses up one of the doors on the stage. The door on the other side obviously is the door where the knocking comes from and where the new characters are presently to enter. So when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth go off to pretend they have been in bed all night, obviously they won't go through the door that leads to the chamber where Duncan's dead body is. Equally, they could hardly go through the door which the audience are being led to suppose leads to the outside world, on which the knocking is coming. But that's not really a difficulty, because they have got a perfectly good exit which is the right exit for the end of such a great scene—the centre exit through the recess curtains. Now as soon as they are off, the next stage direction is 'Enter a porter' and this porter scene has often given a lot of trouble, because it's obviously intended as a piece of comic relief after the tremendous drama and strain of the murder scene, and yet in the theatre it very rarely gets any laughs and most comics find it jolly hard work.

When we were doing our plotting we were quite happy up to that point, but when we came to 'Enter a porter' we looked at each other and said 'From where?' It's obvious that the porter can't enter through the murder door. It's

going to spoil the effect of that door, which has got to be kept in the audience's mind throughout the whole scene, completely if he does. Equally, he can't enter through the door which is established as leading to the outside world and which in a few moments he is going to open to let in the newcomers. Nor would it be at all effective if he made his entrance through the recess curtains because Lady Macbeth and Macbeth have just gone off there, and one would feel that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth had met the porter in the passage, and anyway there would have to be a pause before he could come on. At this point we were feeling very blank. And then suddenly we remembered that there was another way of entering the stage and that was up through the trap in the centre of the stage which I mentioned earlier. Well the first thing of course was that that seemed to be the only place that he could possibly come on from, but as soon as one had arrived at that point one saw that it was the ideal place for him to come on from. Then I realised how Shakespeare had thought that this porter scene was going to have its comic effect; because if you imagine two people going off in a very high state of tension at the back of the centre of the stage, the knocking, pounding on the door, and then suddenly, and in the most unexpected way, a red-nosed, red-faced, sleepy old man popping his head up from the trap-door and saying, 'Knock, knock, knock knock knock', one can see that the laugh is not going to be hard to get, and to get the laugh at that moment is what Shakespeare needs. But it turned out that there was a great deal more in it than that. The porter comes up and says, 'If a man were porter of Hell gate'. Now you remember I said that the space under the stage was known as the Hell. So this links the place the porter enters from with his lines.

Although that's a purely practical illustration it does in

fact, I think you'll see, link up just a bit with the idea that the poetic implications also are revealed by this type of stage.

What all this really comes to is that whether we are simply reading the plays, whether we are thinking of planning a production of them under whatever circumstances, or whether we're seeing them, we should always try and keep in our mind this kind of theatre, the sort of theatre that Shakespeare was writing for, the sort of thing that he thought was going to happen on the stage when he wrote the play.

If we can do that we shall not only understand what is happening, understand his craftsmanship, and the course of the action, but we are likely to come a great deal closer to the heart of what he really wanted us to feel when we saw the play.

The Texts

J. DOVER WILSON

I AM an editor. I've been editing Shakespeare for the last forty years; and though I've tried many different studies and occupations in a long life, I've never found anything to touch it as a source of delight and satisfaction. Indeed, it's one of those studies which, as our Bacon says, 'maketh a full man'. It feeds every side of one's mind, the artistic, the moral, and the scientific. That last may surprise you. But science simply means discovering new facts, raising new problems, trying to reach sound conclusions; and the modern study of Shakespeare gives one plenty of scope for all that. Nor is it at all difficult once you get the hang of it. True, it requires a knowledge of how books were printed and published in Shakespeare's day. But apart from this, almost all you need is industry, a keen eye for detail and common sense. Why not take a hand in it yourself? Let me try and tempt you to by giving you a sort of bird's-eye view of the ground and showing the kind of nuggets you may come upon with a little digging.

There are thirty-seven plays in the Shakespeare Canon. All but one of them, *Pericles*, were published in 1623, seven years after his death, in a large memorial volume we call the First Folio. 'Folio' is a printer's term and means a book printed *in folio* or in leaf, that is, on sheets of paper folded once, giving two leaves and so making a tall volume, a convenient shape you see for one running to many pages.

On the other hand, a book in quarto is one printed on sheets folded twice, giving four leaves and making a square volume about half the height of a folio and so more suitable for a single play. About twenty of the plays in the First Folio had already been published separately in little quarto books during Shakespeare's life-time or just after his death. And so for over half the plays we have two basic texts, one quarto and one folio.

Now, a little before the beginning of the First World War librarians of the British Museum and other scholars who knew about sixteenth and seventeenth century books—bibliographers we call them—discovered, or perhaps I should say *began* to discover, how these texts got into print and what sort of MSS many of them were printed from. There is still a very great deal to be done and it will take generations of scholars to clear it all up—if they ever do. Yet certain general features are already plain. First of all, the quartos have been sorted out into good and bad texts—the 'bad' texts being versions minor actors in Shakespeare's company had written down from what they could remember of the play and then sold, surreptitiously I'm afraid, to publishers for a florin or two. Most, however, of the fourteen 'good quartos', like most of the folio texts, were printed either from his own MS drafts, or from tidied up copies of his MSS, which had been used as prompt-books for performance at his theatre. And these MSS (original or copies) were not edited in any modern sense before being sent to the printer. You see, Shakespeare was always kept so busy writing new plays for his company, that he never had time to publish any of them; and if, as some people think, he meant to prepare a complete edition of his works when he retired to Stratford, death came four years later and ordained otherwise. His early death was a terrible loss for the world;

and yet there was gain too. For many of these old texts were, as I say, printed from his untidy drafts, just as he wrote them, helter-skelter, in the heat of inspiration, as his mind and hand went together, or from playhouse transcripts with the prompter's notes and alterations, and sometimes even with additions by other dramatists. And so they let us right into the theatre and into his study. Why, at times we seem almost to be looking over his shoulder at the manuscript as he writes! Here are one or two examples out of a score I could mention.

You remember of course there are two ridiculous old constables in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Read the play in the Quarto, printed in 1600 from Shakespeare's own MS, and you find that while he calls them Dogberry and Verges when they first enter, in a later scene—perhaps written on another day—he calls them Kempe and Cowley. What's happened? He has simply forgotten the names he originally gave them and instead of taking the trouble to turn back in the manuscript to find out, he's given them the names of the two comic men in his company who were to play these parts. What did it matter? He was not writing for readers, for publication, but for actors, for the theatre; and in the theatre Kempe and Dogberry, Cowley and Verges were the same person. Indeed, as he sat in his study, the speeches he wrote for his plays must have come into his mind in the very tones of the voices of the actors he knew so well.

The quarto and the folio texts show us too that after he had so to speak christened the character at its first entry he often fell back on some sort of general title or description in later stage-directions and speech headings. In the good Quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example, Holofernes (the schoolmaster you remember) is commonly labelled *Ped.* for Pedant; the high-falutin' Armado is similarly labelled *Brag.* for Braggart. *Boy* generally stands for Moth and

Wench for the Dairywoman Jacquenetta, while the Princess of France is quite incorrectly styled *Queen* as the prefix of most of her speeches. This kind of irregularity, by the by, is pretty clear evidence that the text in question was printed from Shakespeare's draft. He was writing I repeat for performance not for publication: so long as he gave the character a name at its first entry he could leave his stage-manager to do the rest. On the other hand, when the names in the speech-headings and stage-directions are consistent throughout a printed text we may feel sure that it derives directly or indirectly from a manuscript prompt-book, where of course everything must be plain and easy for a prompter to follow at a glance.

And here's another kind of irregularity: reading these original texts of Shakespeare we often come across short passages of verse printed as prose or in irregular lines that suggest the printer couldn't tell where to begin or where to end. The printer himself may of course have been responsible in many cases, but occasionally they show that Shakespeare had been writing second thoughts of his own in the margin of his manuscript which didn't allow room for correct verse division and so left the printer at a loss.

A good example is the dialogue between Theseus and Hippolyta and the lovers before the entrance of Pyramus and Thisbe at the beginning of Act V in the good Quarto of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The dialogue you must all know very well. Here we have eighty-four lines of verse which contain no fewer than eight separate patches where the lining has gone all haywire. Leave them out and the fifty-six lines that remain run straight on in metre and meaning. There's only one possible explanation; these correctly printed fifty-six lines represent Shakespeare's first draft and the incorrect patches his marginal additions. It's exciting to

notice too that the additions contain all the finest poetry and most of the fun in the dialogue. Most interesting of all, one of them forms part of the famous passage in which Theseus laughingly tells his bride and the four lovers what lunacy love is. The patch I'm referring to begins:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact

and goes on about the poet, the lunatic and the lover. In the first draft there is no poet; only the lunatic and the lover are laughed at. It looks, don't you think, as if Shakespeare had come to take himself less seriously between the first and second thoughts. How many years divided the two? It's anybody's guess!

Do I hear you say, 'What can I do about it, when I haven't got these quartos and folios to look at?' Well, you can do one thing. You can really look at the notes in your copies of the plays and try and see what the editor who made them was getting at. And then read the text very hard and see whether you think he was right. In this way we can all be editors of Shakespeare.

But this editor must say a word about the aesthetic side of editing before he bids you goodbye. A few years ago I spent twelve months or more examining, under the microscope so to speak, the marvellous texture of the masterpiece we call *Macbeth*. And to do that, if one has any poetic sensibility at all, is to become so enchanted by the music of it, so shaken by the horror of it, so penetrated by the pity of it, that the experience is almost overwhelming—and it's an experience one can always repeat in a different form, by editing another play, as I'm now doing with *King Lear*. And so when anybody asks me 'Why do you edit Shakespeare?' I answer 'I do it because it gives me happiness.'

Shakespeare's Poetry

DAVID DAICHES

SHAKESPEARE, as we all know, was a great poet as well as a great dramatist, and it's his combination of these two skills that gives his plays their extraordinary power and richness. I'd like in the short time at my disposal to talk to you about the way in which Shakespeare's poetry *works*.

To do this properly—to show the different ways in which Shakespeare used language poetically and the different kinds of effects he could achieve—would require many quotations from different plays and from the sonnets, with a detailed discussion of each. This would take many hours. I must be content with something more modest, and I shall try to illustrate at least some of the ways in which Shakespeare's poetry works by talking about two very different examples. Since most people with a general knowledge of English literature know Shakespeare's poetry at the very least from some of his sonnets and from his best-known play, *Hamlet*, I have chosen one of the sonnets and a passage from *Hamlet* to talk about.

Here is the sonnet:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
 Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
 Give warning to the world that I am fled
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not
 The hand that writ it; for I love you so

That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay,
Lest the wise world should look into your moan
And mock you with me after I am gone.

At the outset we notice that the poet here is voicing the very opposite of the conventional poetic sentiment on the subject of love and death. He doesn't want to be remembered after death by the person who loved him and whom he loved. On this he is emphatic: the opening line of the poem rings out, a challenge and a command:

No longer mourn for me when I am dead . . .

The simple, emphatic words—all, except the second, words of one syllable—march on with no pause within the line; indeed there is no pause at the end of the line either, for the sense is 'no longer mourn . . . than you shall hear the surly sullen bell.' Once the church bell has ceased tolling for the funeral, forget about me. But notice how this is put. 'The surly sullen bell' suggests the reluctant and melancholy beat of a funeral bell which tolls a series of single, dull beats at regular intervals—quite distinct from the joyous peal of marriage bells or of the clamorous ringing for celebrations or summons. The first four lines of the sonnet paint a striking picture of the sad tolling of the bell and the fate of the man whose funeral it is announcing:

. . . the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell . . .

Notice the repetition of 'vile' and 'vilest'. The bell

announces that the physical body of the poet has been consigned to earth—and good riddance from this vile world. It's a move from 'vile' to 'vilest'. The tone here is as much savage as melancholy. The first four lines, then, with their alternate rhymes weaving them into a unity—'dead' rhyming flatly and dully with 'fled' and the mournful 'surly sullen bell' being balanced by the hopeless 'with vilest worms to dwell'—these lines have a unity of their own; they are, as it were, the first movement of the sonnet. This first movement starts with a tone of command and ends on a note of bitter resignation. And then notice how Shakespeare lifts the poem into a new mood with that rising, 'Nay, if you read this line . . .' An almost colloquial touch here; and more than that, a sense of the poet, repenting perhaps of his bitterness, leaning forward towards his friend, increasing the intimacy between them:

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it;

- Note that the pause comes in the middle of a line. We are left intrigued and expectant. This new tone, of increased intimacy and confidence, is leading us in a new direction. Why, we wonder, should the person addressed be urged not to remember the hand that wrote the line he is reading? After pausing on this question—and the pause coming in the middle of the line is all the more striking and effective—we are given the answer, which rings out suddenly—an expression of love emerging from the sadness and bitterness of the earlier lines: five short, simple, tremendously emphatic words, 'for I love you so.' There is no pause here, however: the thought moves right on:

for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
If thinking on me then should make you woe.

'Sweet' is a fairly conventional poetic adjective. But here it is used aptly and effectively. On the one hand there is the dead poet, consigned to 'vilest worms', on the other his living friend, alive and thinking—and '*sweet* thoughts' suggests the freshness and brightness of this living friend. He does not wish fresh, gay thoughts to be sullied by remembrance of a poet turned to clay and dwelling with worms. That would turn sweetness to sadness. 'If thinking on me then should make you woe.' Notice again the ringing simplicity of the phrase 'make you woe'; the long open vowel of the word 'woe' rings out to conclude the second group of four lines of the sonnet. Then, with a sense of urgency produced by the repetition and also an increased sense of familiarity the poem continues—'O, if, I say . . .'. The 'O' here is no meaningless and conventional exclamation. The poet leans on it; it rises from his utterance urgently and movingly:

O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
 But let your love even with my life decay, . . .

The rising emotion here—perfectly controlled, but still rising—is finely suggested. The inversion of the natural word order in 'compounded am with clay' gives the emphatic rhyme word to 'clay', and that rhymes with 'decay' two lines further on. 'But let your love even with my life decay.' A faint touch of self-pity is allowed to emerge here, but it's very faint, just enough to make clear that the speaker is aware of the sadness of it all. 'Even with my life' both suggests a parallel between love and life and gives the sense that here they are linked and one should not survive the other. And then, suddenly, in the ringing rhymed

couplet of the conclusion, the poet turns round from elegy to satire, to mock the 'wise world' and register his opinion of how the world behaves:

Lest the wise world should look into your moan
And mock you with me after I am gone.

The world is ungenerous and impertinently curious. If, says the poet, you grieve for me after my death, people who are self-important and wise in their own eyes will try to investigate the cause of your sorrow, and our love will become a subject of gossip and vulgar curiosity. 'Look into your moan' suggests, vividly and economically, prying into private grief. So the effect of the poem is to isolate the poet and the person he is addressing from the world, to enhance their love by emphasising how the two of them do not belong to the curious, vulgar, 'wise' world—at the same time as it pleads that there should be no mourning for the poet after his death. The whole movement is subtly managed, and the progression of mood and image carefully moulded into a whole. Shakespeare had only the fourteen lines of the sonnet-form to play with, and he used them in three groups of four and a final couplet of two lines balancing the whole. What complexity and variety he achieves in the movement of this short poem! Consider again how it proceeds from the opening emphatic 'No longer mourn for me . . .' through the colloquial 'Nay, if you read this line,' and the rising emotion of 'O, if, I say,' to the final ironic 'And mock you with me after I am gone.'

Let me turn now to *Hamlet*. In the first scene, after the ghost has appeared to Horatio, Bernardo and Marcellus, the three men remain for a few moments to talk over the significance of the strange apparition they have just seen. Bernardo remarks

It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

And Horatio continues:

And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet of the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine; and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

Bernardo's remark—'It was about to speak, when the cock crew'—is simple and matter-of-fact. But it is a line of verse, and the simplicity of the language is given greater force by the rhythmic strength of the line. The rhythm deliberately wrenches the normal iambic pentameter beat which underlies Shakespeare's blank verse: the line doesn't run, 'It wás abóut to spéak, when thé cock créw,' which sounds ridiculous, but, 'It was about to spéak, when the côck créw,' ending on two strong beats which are arresting, almost startling in their emphasis and the sense of expectation which they arouse. Every word in the line, except one, consists of a single syllable: nothing could be plainer. It's a soldier who is talking, and there is a sense of military plainness and authority about the line. But it's Horatio, the philosopher, who proceeds to probe the implications of Bernardo's emphatic and intriguing utterance. There is something sinister in the ghost's sudden disappearance. 'And then it started like a guilty thing, Upon a fearful summons.' The indefiniteness of *thing* adds a note of mystery, almost of terror. The ghost at this stage, you will note, is not 'he' but 'it'. Its identity is mysterious; it seems to be involved in a nameless guilt, which

has put it in the power of a nameless and frightening authority.

There is a pause after the phrase 'upon a fearful summons'. Then Horatio proceeds to relate the strange scene they have just witnessed to what he knows about life. He wants to try and shed some daylight on the business. After the pause in the middle of the line he begins again, with the half-sceptical, half-reassuring phrase 'I have heard'—

I have heard

The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine; and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

His language becomes almost declamatory—'trumpet to the morn', 'lofty and shrill-sounding throat', 'Awake the god of day'. This is a deliberately buoyant description of dawn, as though Horatio is trying to raise everybody's spirits. The trumpet sounds, the god of day awakes, brightness and normality are established on the earth, and everything odd and sinister slinks away—'The extravagant and erring spirit hies To his confine'. ('Extravagant and erring' means vagrant and wandering.) That is, the god-like sun chases away all disturbing spirits. That is what he has heard,

and of the truth herein

This present object made probation.

This is a curiously matter-of-fact ending to Horatio's speech, rather dry, almost shrugging. It is even faintly pedantic in expression. There is an air of 'Q.E.D.' about it. The last line runs on without a pause to its dull conclusion. Horatio the sceptical philosopher is bringing forward a popular

explanation of a disturbing event; but his tone shows that he doesn't wholly believe it.

Marcellus now adds his comment. He is more struck with the wonder of it all, and in his speech the verse sings out to suggest a beneficent spirit ruling over all these things:

It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

The cock is no longer the simple cock it was in Bernardo's phrase, 'when the cock crew'. It is 'the bird of dawning', a magical bird, whose singing protects the world from harm. The line 'The bird of dawning singeth all night long' sings out like an incantation, and the final line of the speech, 'So hallow'd and so gracious is the time' sums the matter up in a phrase of formal beauty. Horatio brings him down to earth with his sceptical comment

So have I heard and do in part believe it.

The reluctance to believe what is outside his philosophy is felt in the very run of the line. Horatio goes on immediately, however, in quite different vein;

But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

While they have been talking the dawn has come up—a real, present dawn, not the magical and hypothetical dawn they have been discussing. They are caught unawares by its quiet beauty, and Horatio is surprised into a richer poetry

than he has so far spoken. Most of us feel the power of these two lines as something much more vivid and suggestive than any lighting effects could achieve on the modern stage to suggest a particular kind of sunrise. How exactly is this achieved?

We are arrested at once by a gesture—‘But look . . .’ The gesture beckons us to watch a scene in our mind’s eye—almost, I feel, to participate in a ritual. The morning is implicitly personified as a goddess, who ‘walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill.’ She doesn’t walk over the grass, but over the *dew*, and men’s imagination—in Europe at least—has for long dwelt on the dew as a magic liquid, mysteriously falling from Heaven (which it doesn’t in fact do, of course) and having regenerative qualities, so that in the folklore of many countries young girls who want to be beautiful must wash their faces in dew on the 1st of May. Grass is the lowest common denominator of growth; to say that the morn walked over the grass would be to suggest an association between the dawn and routine vegetable growth; but to make Dawn walk over the *dew* is to suggest the mysteriously regenerative effects of the coming of a new day, when decisions can be arrived at and purposive action taken. It’s significant that immediately afterwards Horatio goes on to give practical advice:

Break we our watch up; and, by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet.

The scene ends on a note of practicality and efficiency:

Let’s do’t pray; and I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently.

The verse has brought us round to simple, present fact again.

I hope that these examples will help to show how the

language of Shakespeare's poetry operates. At each point it's handled in such a way—in the choice of words, their placing, the kind of emphasis that is thrown on them—that the meaning is simultaneously *defined* more sharply and *enriched* with all kinds of suggestions and overtones. It's this combination of precision and suggestiveness, of sharp definition and rich implication, that is the special characteristic of Shakespeare's poetic way of using words.

The Shape of Shakespeare's Plays

RICHARD DAVID

'THE shape of Shakespeare's plays'—what do I mean by 'shape'?

Until recently, 'shape' would have been the last quality most people would have expected to find in a play of Shakespeare; for Shakespeare, they thought, was the great *undisciplined* genius, his work full of individual splendours but as a whole sprawling, untidy, *shapeless*, and lacking in artistic control. Now we have begun to see that he was (as well as everything else) a great dramatic artist.

Every work of art has shape or form, for the artist's aim is to reduce his experience to order, to a form that can be grasped by the mind. Statues, pottery, pictures have shape in space. It more or less literally 'hits you in the eye'. You can take out your rule, measure the proportions, exactly gauge the curves. A short poem may have this spatial shape too, for example a sonnet. If you turn the pages of an anthology, you will probably spot the sonnets from the look of them on the page, before ever you read a word. That squarish shape, with a certain pattern of line-indentation, is quite distinctive. But the poem will also have a second kind of shape developed not in space but in time. You probably know Shakespeare's sonnet beginning 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate.' These first two lines put a proposition; the next six develop one side of the comparison and build up the descrip-

tion of the summer's day—fugitive, intemperate, changeable—to a climax. The third quatrain introduces, as a strong counter-subject, the other side of the comparison: 'But THY eternal summer shall not fade.' Four powerful, confident lines about THY lasting beauty balance the two lines of proposition and the six more tentative ones about the inconstant summer day. The final couplet rounds off the discussion and makes the essential point: the whole reason why THOU is more lastingly beautiful than the day is that the poet, Shakespeare, has put him in a sonnet. There is then this pattern of thought, this argument, in the poem, partly induced, it is true, by its physical shape (the three quatrains and clinching couplet) and yet separable from it. You can describe this 'shape-in-time' as a crescendo and decrescendo; or as a simple opening and a neat close with a great expansion of feeling between them. The shape of a play (as of a piece of music) is of this second kind: it emerges only in time and you must see or hear the whole unrolled before you can apprehend it complete. One of the earliest critics put it at its simplest when he said 'A dramatic action must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.' How does the dramatist begin upon his subject (with a bang or gradually?), how does he introduce variety midway without distracting attention from his main theme, is his ending expected or not? It is on such points as these that the 'shape' of a play depends.

Let me begin with simple, small-scale examples from single scenes of Shakespeare: and, first the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock, you will remember, is suing the merchant Antonio for a pound of his flesh, forfeit to Shylock in return for the loan Antonio cannot repay. The first half of the scene is a great crescendo of triumph for Shylock. He is out for Antonio's blood, and nothing, it seems, can save his victim. The law is all too clearly on Shy-

lock's side. There is mounting despair as the pleas for mercy of Antonio's friends, of the Duke of Venice, of Portia successively fail. Portia is even driven to confirm that Shylock's revenge is entirely legal—'O wise and upright judge!' cries Shylock. Then, when his knife is at Antonio's breast, suddenly—'Tarry a little' says Portia; and soon the whole process is tumultuously in reverse. The law turns out to be not on Shylock's side after all. 'O upright judge!' mocks Gratiano, for it is now Shylock who is condemned and must beg the mercy he refused to grant. A sweep up one side, a corresponding sweep down on the other: that is, baldly, the shape of the scene.

As a second example, look at the scene in *King Lear* where the king is finally driven mad by his unkind daughters. He has left the eldest, Goneril, because she refuses to house his retinue of a hundred knights, and expects to find the second, Regan, more daughterly. While he is telling his sad story, Goneril herself arrives and—horror!—is welcomed by Regan. They beset him on either side, beating down his pleas in an ever-quickenning auction: Goneril reduces his hundred knights to fifty, Regan then goes to twenty-five, Goneril comes back with ten or five, and finally Regan says 'What need one?' At this climax a great cry breaks from the king, 'O reason not the need!' As his passion rises his words become more and more incoherent, till with 'O fool I shall go mad!' he rushes out on to the heath. His exit is capped by the first ominous threatenings of the storm that is to follow. Here the daughters' taunts accelerate to a climax from which springs a second climax which is crowned by a third. The shape is that of a three-stage rocket.

Now see the same sort of process developing through a whole play. *Henry IV Part I* is beautifully 'shaped'. Its

theme is the making of a king. The young prince Hal is potentially the stuff that kings are made of, but might easily go astray in one of two directions, towards glory for glory's sake or towards the inglorious evasion of his responsibilities. These two dangers are richly personified in two characters, Hotspur and Falstaff, two equal and opposite temptations either side of the true path to kingliness. The play's theme is thus symmetrically balanced. The working out is equally shapely. The first scene shortly presents the responsibilities of kingship manifested in the reigning king, Hal's father. The second, after introducing the prince, proceeds to paint Falstaff's world at leisure, while the third does the same for Hotspur's. For a time Glory (in verse) and Ingloriousness (in prose) continue to set each other off alternately in richly detailed scenes. The last on Hotspur's side is the meeting of the rebel leaders with their Welsh ally, Owen Glendower. It begins in lively fashion, with Hotspur and Glendower each out-glorying the other; but when they have at last hammered out between them some sort of plan of campaign, the whole temper of the scene suddenly changes. Lady Hotspur and Glendower's daughter come to take leave of the warriors before they go to battle. Glendower conjures music out of the air, his daughter speaks passionately in Welsh, then sings in the same musical and (to us) remote language. The effect, eerie, wistful, full of foreboding, is accompanied and counterpointed by Hotspur's leave-taking of his wife in wry, deliberately offhand jests. It is the lull before the storm, the tense period of waiting before troops go into battle. As such it perfectly conveys the state of the characters, but it is also a key-point in the structure of the play. Shakespeare has set out all the pieces; he is now to start the game proper and, as he so often does, he too pauses before going into action. These pauses, these points of relaxation, are highly char-

acteristic of Shakespeare. He seems to know exactly when the audience needs to take breath; knows, too, when the actor has reached breaking-point and must have a quiet spell to recover his forces.

The second part of the play opens with a splendidly vigorous scene between the King and the Prince, in which Prince Hal is made to face the choice before him. And now the scenes shorten, the pace quickens, the issue sways this way and that. Finally all the threads are drawn together and neatly tied on the battlefield of Shrewsbury, where all the characters assemble, and where Hal kills Hotspur, carelessly shrugs off Falstaff, and identifies himself with the king his father, whose life he saves.

The shape of *Henry V* is very different. The earlier play presents a king in the making, this a king fully made. *Henry IV* unfolds a development, a progress; *Henry V* merely displays in turn the different facets of a finished character. The play is static not dynamic. True, a story, the story of Agincourt runs through it, but what really matters is the King, seen in various predicaments. This central 'situation' does not change; instead it is set off, in contrast, by a series of comic turns in themselves pretty hackneyed—the braggart coward, the broken English joke, the Scotsman, the Irishman and the Welshman.

This static pattern, this episodic structure, is particularly common in comedy. In *As You Like It* everything hangs on the ironic cross-purposes of a lover conversing with his lady-love without knowing it is she. Shakespeare, having successfully contrived this situation, has only to keep it going for as long as possible. Nothing much *happens*; and contrast is again provided by a series of turns—acrobatics, cross-talk comedians, songs. *As You Like It*, like *Henry V*, is built on the lines of music-hall variety.

As an example of a comedy with a more 'active' shape, take *The Merchant of Venice* again. This has two themes, the famous old stories of the pound of flesh and of the three caskets, apparently with nothing to connect them. At first these two themes are developed independently, in two separate compartments, Venice and Belmont, but as the play proceeds they seem to work their way one into the other. Memories of Antonio's young friend Bassanio are recalled at Belmont, news of Bassanio's success with the caskets filters back to Venice. Characters originating in the pound of flesh plot (Shylock's daughter Jessica, the Venetian clown Gobbo) transmigrate to the world of the caskets, and it is the heroine of the casket story, Portia herself, that alone can resolve the Venetian knot. Finally, with most of the characters from each side reunited at Belmont, the coda of the lost rings plays sparkingly over both themes.

Tragedies tend to follow the more dynamic pattern; indeed I think the idea of running a course, following a destiny, is fundamental to tragedy. The tragic hero sets out vigorously on a certain course of action, and at first may prosper, though the audience can always perceive that the way leads to disaster. We watch fascinated as first the hero's rise is checked and then he falls faster and faster to his doom. Of course variations of this pattern can be infinite. Macbeth starts falling almost before the play opens; Hamlet's is a much slower and more laborious progress. Hamlet is like a man pushing a heavy object up an inclined plane; after each effort he must rest, may even be pushed back a little. Towards the end, when we begin to think he never *will* get his load over the top, it seems as if the slope is suddenly tipped the other way and Hamlet is drawn on rushing, whether he will or no, to his triumph and to his death. The play has been all stop and go, surge and pause.

Othello on the other hand has no stops; it is one great springing curve whose very impetuosity and verve carry the spectator unquestioningly through every sort of improbability. *King Lear* is a double curve, for the sub-plot is an echo or reflection of the main story. Lear, intemperate in mind, is betrayed by his unfilial daughters and loses the light of his mind, his reason; Gloucester, intemperate in body, is betrayed by his bastard son and loses the light of his body, his sight. It is this parallelism that makes such an overwhelming climax of the meeting between blind Gloucester and mad Lear.

Now I must leave you to discover other such dramatic 'shapes' for yourselves. Every play, every scene of Shakespeare has been given purposeful form and direction by its author, and these determine the meaning and the effect of the whole. In the theatre, embodied in flesh-and-blood actors, the shapes should stand out of themselves: we can *hear* the sudden hush in the courtroom of Venice before the process of law is reversed, we can *see* the sisters closing in on Lear. But if we are studying the plays for ourselves we must keep our mental eyes well open and our mental ears cocked for a quality which is absolutely essential to drama and in which Shakespeare was skilled perhaps above all other dramatists.

Shakespeare's Imagery

L. C. KNIGHTS

IT is almost impossible to give a useful short definition of imagery. So instead of trying to define let me simply recall what imagery does. The root meaning of the word is 'likeness': a mental image is *like* something you have previously experienced or had knowledge of. This applies equally to images that form part of the stock-in-trade of ordinary talk and to the images of the poets: it applies to commonplace phrases like 'a frosty welcome' or 'a pea-soup fog', and to Shakespeare's 'the winter of our discontent' and 'the blanket of the dark'. What we know of frosts and pea-soup, or of winter and blankets, is called in to help us grasp what is *meant* by the speaker.

And that is the first thing to get hold of. In successful poetry, in Shakespeare above all, imagery isn't just decoration or the poetical dressing up of something that could be just as well expressed in plain prose. The poet uses imagery to convey *meanings*. In Shakespeare's early poetry you do sometimes find images that are little more than decoration of a simple idea or feeling. Take Romeo's rhapsody when he sees Juliet at her window. In the course of it he says,

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
 As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
 Would through the airy region stream so bright
 That birds would sing and think it were not night.

It's a pretty fancy, but nothing more: you can't ask questions about the imagery (what 'business' had the stars when they left their spheres?); you can't think about it very much; all you can take from it is a sense of the brightness of Juliet's eyes and of how, at the moment, they mean more to Romeo than anything else in the visible world. But put beside this speech Macbeth's soliloquy when he has heard of the death of his wife:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death . . .

There are several telling images there:—'creeps in this petty pace', with its suggestion of an insignificant creature on a slow and tedious journey; 'last syllable', which suggests, without actually stating the idea, that life is nothing more than a tale that is told (later, it becomes 'a tale told by an idiot'—incoherent and meaningless); and then there is the image of time holding a torch to light fools on their journey. All these images *mean* something. But it is 'dusty death' that I want to pause on:

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death.

Why 'dusty'? Well, there is an echo of the burial service—'ashes to ashes and dust to dust'. Perhaps that is the most obvious allusion; but there is also a far wider range of associations that are, as it were, drawn into the magnetic

field of 'dusty': there is the dust on disregarded monuments and in unused rooms, and there is the dust of the well-trodden track of the mortal journey, and there are insignificant motes of dust, moving aimlessly, as one sometimes sees them in a shaft of sunlight. All these convey something indispensable to the expression of Macbeth's thought and feeling at this precise moment of his career—the lassitude, the failure of hope, the inability to see any significance in the course he has followed. Nor, for Macbeth, is there anything grand or heroic in death: it is simply a crumbling away into insignificance. I do not see how this complex but powerful meaning could have been expressed except through this striking image.

We can learn a good deal more about imagery from this passage. The images are not self-contained little units of meaning: they interact with all the other elements of the verse. I said that 'creeps in this petty pace' suggests a tedious journey, and this is reinforced both by repetition and alliteration, with, here, the suggestion of monotonous sameness—

Creeps in this *petty pace* from *day* to *day*.

And at the same time the rhythm is slow and dragging; just as in the next line—

To the last syllable of recorded time—

the stress on 'last syllable', following two unaccented words, forces us to sense the weariness and boredom in the words as we read them. And perhaps above all the lines I have read bring out how inadequate it is to describe images as 'little pictures in the mind's eye'. People vary enormously in the extent to which they 'visualize' what they are thinking about. Perhaps some pictures have passed through your

minds as you thought about this passage—flickering lights and shadows at ‘all our yesterdays have lighted fools’, perhaps. But I’m pretty sure you didn’t ‘see’ very much at ‘dusty death’.

This brings me to my next main point. The metaphors and similes that make up the greater part of what we know as imagery may convey their meanings by drawing on experiences that have to do with sight, but they are under no obligation to confine themselves in this way. When Lady Macbeth tells her husband to wash after the murder of Duncan, he looks at his hands and says,

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

This, I suppose, is a visual image: ‘incarnadine’—Duncan’s blood is colouring everything, as—in a metaphorical sense—it is to ‘colour’ Macbeth’s life from now on. But now think of the passage before the murder, where Lady Macbeth taunts her husband into resolution:

MACBETH: If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH: We fail?

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we’ll not fail.

To screw to the sticking-place is, probably, an image taken from the action of a soldier screwing up the cord of his cross-bow to the point where the arrow can be sped from the bow with greatest force. But it’s not a visual image; it’s an image of muscular strain. A few lines later Macbeth uses a similar image from a cross-bow:

I am settled, and *bend up*
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

In each instance moral strain, a tension of the will, is conveyed by images of physical strain and tautness.

Let us take one more example of this 'sensory' element in imagery and consider what it does. Everyone has noticed that *Macbeth* is a play of darkness. It is not only that some of the crucial scenes—Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking—take place at night, darkness is constantly invoked.

Come, thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold!'

So Lady Macbeth as she calls on the 'murth'ring ministers'. Now here, as throughout the play, the imagery of darkness doesn't simply suggest a vaguely appropriate setting for crime; it enlists what we know through our senses to give a precise equivalent for the moral action. 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light', says St. John. 'But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.' That of course is metaphor, but it is not 'just metaphor': it is a fact that if you hate a man you simply cannot see him as he is: you are blinding yourself and walking in darkness. The imagery of darkness in *Macbeth* is used in a similar way. Murder rebounds on the murderer not only in the form of fears and suspicions but by decreasing his capacity to see. At the end Lady Macbeth is a sleepwalker in more senses than one—her eyes are open, 'but their sense is shut'.

But to return to Lady Macbeth's 'Come, thick Night . . .'—the darkness that is evoked is a darkness you can feel: 'thick night', heavy like a woollen 'pall', choking like

'smoke', a stifling 'blanket' of oppression. And this sense of clogged and impeded movement is as important as the absence of light: the world that Macbeth and his wife come to inhabit is heavy with this sense of oppression.

What I am trying to say is that in *Macbeth* Shakespeare gives you more than a story of crime and punishment; he is bent on exploring what a crime of this sort *means*. And if we come to feel that a large part of the meaning lies in our awakened sense of Macbeth's crime as self-destruction, a warping and perversion of essential energies, that is largely because the imagery has told us far more than could be conveyed by ordinary, non-poetic statement.

Notice that I say *largely* because of the imagery—not *entirely*. Just as, when you are looking at any one passage, you can't isolate images from other elements of the verse, so you can't isolate the linked-up imagery of the play as a whole from the larger dramatic structure of action, character and symbolism. There is a good deal of imagery of disorder in *Macbeth*—the description of the marvellous happenings on the night of Duncan's murder (the 'unruly' night, as it is called), and Macbeth's terrible invocation of chaos when he tries to get reassurance from the witches, are both images of the turmoil in his mind, and they link on with other images of disorder, such as the description of Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking as 'a great perturbation in nature'. But Shakespeare does not rely only on imagery to suggest disorder. There is sometimes direct statement, as when we are told of Macbeth that 'all that is within him does condemn Itself, for being there'. And there is sometimes, also, what you can call symbolic action—though in Shakespeare it is usually so natural that you are hardly conscious of it as being deliberately symbolic. But think for a moment of the scene of the 'solemn supper' that Macbeth arranges on the day when he

knows that Banquo is to be murdered. It is Banquo's ghost that puts an end to the proceedings—breaks 'the good meeting with most admir'd disorder', and the guests are bundled out unceremoniously—

Stand not upon the order of your going,
But go at once.

The scene is dramatically convincing as what might well happen: but it is also a symbol of the impossibility of founding a settled order on murder. And that in turn is borne out by the sequence of events as Shakespeare shows us how one action is linked to another by a chain of cause and effect. So once again the imagery cannot be separated out from all the other things that the play gives us to attend to.

All the same, the imagery does demand some special attention as an important carrier of meanings. Shakespeare's varied images prompt the reader to an unusual activity of understanding; and I think it is this activity of mind—the activity of our own minds to which we are prompted—that helps to create a depth of meaning far greater than could be conveyed by a narrative of events in plain prose. Dryden said of Shakespeare, 'When he describes a thing you more than see it, you feel it too'. If, in a sense, you *feel* Lady Macbeth's state of mind when she invokes the ministers of evil, that is largely because of the particular images of smothering darkness that Shakespeare puts into her mouth. But one final word of warning. You don't have to look out for images like a detective looking for clues, which can then be pieced together to solve a puzzle. There is a time for relaxed, as well as for concentrated, reading. Give yourselves to the imaginative experience of the plays; attend to anything that genuinely grips you with a sense of special significance; make connexions between one thing and

another; allow the play to come to life in your mind naturally and without forcing. When you read Shakespeare in this way you are likely to find, again and again, that the images are points of new growth in your understanding.

Plot and Character in the Plays

M. R. RIDLEY

PLOT versus Character—which is the more important in drama? Opinions of critics, playwrights, and audiences, have differed widely; and Shakespeare, characteristically, stands somewhere between the contestants and gives the answer of the practical expert.

One of the earliest, and one of the greatest, of literary critics had no doubt at all about the answer. ‘The story,’ said Aristotle, ‘is the beginning and as it were the soul of tragedy; characterisation comes second.’ Nothing could be more explicit.

What came off for Aristotle and the Greeks was a good *story*, as we should say a good strong plot, and that was because tragedy for them was a descent from happiness to misery; and, as Aristotle firmly says, we count a man happy or unhappy in view of what happens to him not in view of what he is.

The most famous of Greek tragedies is one with a brilliantly strong plot, slowly rising tension, leading relentlessly to a discovery which causes a catastrophic reversal of fortune.

Aristotle did indeed spend some time on discussing how best to depict character. But it is there ‘for the sake of the action’—i.e. if the tragic events are to move us they must happen to people, not to dummies, since the misfortunes of dummies wouldn’t move anyone.

We have now moved a long way from Aristotle. We live,

as we are often reminded, in a psychological age; and we have to accept the fact. And so dramas can be written, and can even succeed, which are primarily analyses of character, and in which singularly little 'happens', in the ordinary sense, from beginning to end. In fact, the action (if any) is there for the sake of the characters, and not the other way round.

Now I doubt whether the problem of 'Plot and Character' ever presented itself to Shakespeare as a problem at all, any more than the unities did. With them, if it suited his purpose he observed them, as in *The Tempest*, if it did not, he neglected them as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or even scouted and flouted them as in *The Winter's Tale*. So with Plot and Character. He would give more, or less, importance to either as it would help the effect he wanted. But that effect depended on two things, what he liked, and what his audience liked. For himself, he knew all manner of varieties of men and women, not only with the cool skill of the dissector, but with the warm understanding of the fellow human being. And it's pretty obvious that the diversity of human nature, with its foibles and failings, strengths and weaknesses, unexpected dignities like Feeble's 'We owe God a death', sudden flashes like Beatrice's 'Kill Claudio', breakdowns of control, like Lady Macbeth's or Angelo's, odd reactions to shock, like Malcolm's 'Oh, by whom?', all this rich diversity was to him not just material for his craft, but something in itself profoundly exciting, inexhaustibly stimulating. As a result, after his quite early work, he is almost incapable of creating a character, however minor, who has not blood in his veins and moves like a human being, not like a puppet. Look at old Capulet, Juliet's father; any conventional old father would serve the needs of the plot well enough; but that would not satisfy Shakespeare and with a deft stroke or two he puts

before us one of the most lifelike tetchy old gentlemen that ever stamped across a stage.

None the less, Shakespeare was a thoroughly practical playwright, making a living for himself and his fellows by writing plays that would be acceptable to the contemporary audience. And this audience was not one to be content with character-study, however brilliant. It liked vigorous action, it liked situations either entertaining or heart-rending, and though it might be lenient to improbabilities or incoherences of plot, it certainly demanded effectively dramatic episodes; in a word, it demanded 'theatre'. And Shakespeare, prudently, responded. It's true that, being Shakespeare, he gave his audiences also more than they demanded, much that they were probably unaware that they were getting. But he did give them what he knew they wanted.

May we now glance at some of the plays a little more in detail. I haven't the time to examine the early comedies, interesting though they are as 'prentice work. It's when we get to the great middle period comedies, and to the tragedies, that it becomes exciting to watch Shakespeare at work.

With regard to the comedies I shall put up, as an Aunt Sally to be shied at, the hazardous generalisation that in them Shakespeare is primarily concerned, on the one hand with situation rather than plot, and on the other with character. Such plot as there is is there to allow the situations to develop, and the situations derive a great part of their humour from the characters who are involved in them. Take *As You Like It*; the plot is negligible, no more than a device for getting us into Arden and Rosalind into boy's clothes. What we enjoy is two, perhaps three, sets of wooings, Orlando-Ganymede, Touchstone-Audrey, Silvius-Phebe, each with its different kind of humour, along with interludes from Touchstone and Jaques. One notices that the complete excision of Jaques

would have precisely no effect on the *movement* of the play, however much it would impoverish its total effect. *Twelfth Night*? Well . . . a plot of sorts, indeed two of them, the 'above-stairs' and the 'below-stairs'. But again, isn't it *characters in situations* that entertain us, the disguised Viola as proxy-wooer, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Malvolio, the cross-gartering and the duel? *Much Ado*, on the other hand, has two real plots, one of them near to tragedy, and we are genuinely anxious about the outcome. The play is the best knit, the most cunningly mortised, of the comedies. But even so, isn't what holds us the brilliant interchanges between Beatrice and Benedick, and the sharply contrasted unconscious humour of the two engaging old dotards of the watch? Though one notices—a most Shakespearean touch—that it's the two old stupids, and not the clever people, who explode Don John's plot. The real exception is *The Merchant of Venice*. This has a plot which grips us, and which works up to a climax and a sudden reversal of fortune. But the play has less real comedy in it than any of the others, and also, I think, not less *competent*, but less *vital* characterization, except for Shylock. Portia is not in the same class as Beatrice or Rosalind. The truth, I suppose, is that comedy, which from its nature is to have a happy ending, does not need growing tension and a plot which we follow with strained excitement. A story coherent enough to hold our attention, and produce the necessary situations, will serve. Anything more is a sort of bonus, and may be even a distracting and therefore undesirable bonus.

But tragedy is a very different matter. The Elizabethans, as on the whole the Greeks before them, did in tragedy demand a plot, tension, a conflict, leading to a *dénouement* the more violent the better. How did Shakespeare satisfy this demand and at the same time allow himself scope for his

own interest in human beings and how they behave under stress?

Hamlet has a strong dramatic plot with melodramatic embellishments, leading up to a superb climax with a satisfying mélange of corpses. The tension of the conflict is in fact, as Shakespeare wrote the play, a great deal stronger than many modern producers and actors allow to appear. The overstrung intellectual with whom we are so often presented is no opponent for Claudius, who would not have lost a minute's sleep over him; but the Hamlet whom Shakespeare drew saw the conflict as one between mighty opposites with their fell incensed points. And as an exciting play with a strong plot the Elizabethans I am sure accepted it (neither they nor the two centuries which followed them having the dubious privilege of Coleridge as interpreter).

But I suggest that what grips *us* in the tragedies, and what I believe primarily interested Shakespeare himself, is not so much what happens, materially, to the characters, as what sort of people they are when the tragedy ends. Our anxious question is not so much 'Will Hamlet kill the King?' as 'Has Hamlet really made up his mind to kill the King?' (And you notice that he hasn't—he's made up his mind that he would be justified in killing him, quite another matter.) And I believe that what makes *Hamlet*, for all its greatness, not wholly satisfactory is that Shakespeare had not yet contrived a harmony between plot and character. Hamlet is not the right character for that particular plot.

What about the other tragedies? *Antony and Cleopatra* has no recognizable plot at all, but a sequence of events and a series of oscillations on the part of Antony. What makes it so thrilling a piece of work—to many people the most thrilling of all Shakespeare's plays—is the two great figures and the superb dramatic poetry, Shakespeare's high-water-

mark, I think, in that kind. *Macbeth*? What interests us, and I think interested Shakespeare, is the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, the interaction between them, and their reaction to events. The deterioration of a fine man into a hard villain is hardly a plot. We are almost tempted to say that there isn't a dramatic plot. But there is, though *we* neglect it. I owe to Granville Barker the suggestion that what must have made the end of *Macbeth*, which is almost dull to us, profoundly exciting to the Elizabethans was the fact that they were genuinely agitated over the matter of succession to the throne—would the rightful heir make good his claim to his rightful inheritance—the good old melodramatic situation. But that leaves *us* comparatively cold, because it has nothing whatever to do with the characters of the two main figures, though everything to do with their fates. Plot and character are not brought into effective harmony.

King Lear is a tremendous work, by all odds the most overwhelming work that Shakespeare wrote. But you notice that the sub-plot is much much more of a plot than the main story. Edmund's machinations, brilliantly successful at the outset, his dangerous intrigues with the two sisters, and his ultimate downfall, these make a strong dramatic plot. But in the main story our agonised concerns are, I think, two—and neither is 'Will Lear recover his kingdom?' They are, will Lear's desperate clutching at his sanity hold or slip? and will he, through his tortures, in the end attain to a sense of reality which he has never yet known? And those are matters of character, not of plot.

Before I go on to my last play it is perhaps worthwhile to cast back to a much earlier one. *Romeo and Juliet* has a thoroughly good tense plot which we follow with continuous and rising excitement. And it has a number of live characters. A

working balance between plot and character is achieved. But you notice *how* it is achieved—by subordinating character to plot. It's a tragedy of the older type, the Aristotle type, in which it's the *fate* of the star-crossed lovers that matters. Few are so censorious as to hold that either of the lovers can be justly held responsible for their tragedy, and they are appealing, infinitely appealing, rather than 'interesting'.

And now, very briefly, for *Othello*. Here, I think, Shakespeare did for once achieve a complete and masterly balanced union of plot and character—his kind of character. Even in Cinthio's crude narrative, with no characterisation worth mentioning, the plot is a gripping one. And under Shakespeare's handling it becomes yet more so. Every move of Iago is precisely timed and adroitly executed, and the famous 'temptation scene' is a masterpiece of dramatic tension. But, in Shakespeare, isn't it true to say that, if one may put it so, the plot *is* the characters? It is because Othello is what he is, and Iago what *he* is, both so vividly drawn, and that Othello slowly becomes what Iago's potent devilry makes him, that the play imposes on the audience, as the levers of the rack are notch by notch tightened, that relentless strain which makes Othello not indeed Shakespeare's greatest work but by long odds his most powerful piece of pure 'theatre'. Well, plot or character—which is the more important? The answer surely is both: and Shakespeare to my mind illustrated the answer in *Othello*.

A Modern Producer and the Plays

TYRONE GUTHRIE

As an undergraduate in the early twenties I used to go to performances by Sir Frank Benson's company which visited Oxford every year. Benson did a great deal in keeping Shakespeare's plays continuously before the public; and his company, I have been told, was a wonderful school for actors. But when I saw the company it wasn't very good. The productions, by then extremely old-fashioned and also dilapidated by long and continuous touring, were in a style, which I assume derived from Irving. It all seemed very dowdy, but then I suppose the twenty-year-olds of today must be thinking exactly the same of my generation and our work. And yet I suspect that the Benson company at this epoch was *not* making a very illuminating contribution. Sir Frank Benson, nearing seventy, was still playing young leading roles. He had been a very handsome and athletic man and was proud of his physique. But now he was faded and gaunt, and the spectacle of rouged and ruined masculine beauty was a sad one. In the part of Caliban he turned a few creaky handsprings and at one point of the play—I forget the precise context—a pair of parallel bars appeared on the Magic Island and Caliban gravely and, to the intense embarrassment of a respectful audience, hung upside down.

Hamlet was better. Benson was, of course, distressingly old for the part and acted without any fire. But it was an intelligent performance and for the first time I began to see why these plays were considered masterpieces; I began to

realise what complicated elaborate pieces of structure they were—Dramatic Cathedrals; began to see how interesting they were as narrative; how, over and above, and through the narrative were implicit meanings like the echoes in a great Cathedral; began to feel what richness of character was there; began to hear what melody was in the lines. Like thousands of others my eyes and ears were first opened by the performance of Sir Frank Benson and his company; and I am profoundly grateful. They opened rather dusty creaky old casements, but still casements which opened on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

After that, and for some years, I saw no Shakespeare on the stage which was not a disappointment. By now I was working in the theatre and very much involved with what we used to call Folk-plays. It then seemed to me extremely important, and so it still does, that the theatre should not just be an expression of upper-class life in Metropolitan Cities. Our plays were mostly set in farm kitchens, or in slums, because our folk-actors were more at home in that kind of environment; and we were apt to regard Shakespeare as far too high-falutin' and 'Fancy' for us. As for Shakespearean acting—words can't begin to describe the contempt in which we held it. It seemed to us nothing but ranting and empty roaring.

Two productions taught me better. Lewis Casson's nobly rhetorical *Henry VIII* with splendiferous décors by Charles Ricketts and a powerful, astringent Katherine by Sybil Thorndike. Then a year or two later there was an exquisite production at the Old Vic by John Gielgud. The play was *The Merchant of Venice*. Here, for the first time in my still very limited experience, was a Shakespearean comedy which wasn't heavily and boringly trying to be 'funny', but was, instead, elegant and witty, light as a feather and so gaily

sophisticated that beside it Maugham and Noël Coward seemed like two Congregational Ministers from the Midlands.

It was around this time that I began to think Folk-Drama somewhat limited in scope; and to wonder whether the undoubted merits of genuineness and simplicity mightn't also apply to the Great Classics in general and William Shakespeare in especial.

I have talked at this length about my own experience because to this extent I think it is fairly typical: it took me a good long time to 'get around' to Shakespeare. But once around I've stayed around and found in his works not merely professional interest, but material by which to live, spiritual meat and drink and light and heat.

The joy of knowing something about a Masterpiece, be it of painting, music, literature, architecture, what you will, is that the better you know it the more you find remains unknown, the more awaits discovery. I have seen many of the great actors of our day play Hamlet—the most accomplished and melodious was Gielgud, the most exciting Olivier, the most interesting was Guinness—I have seen it played by schoolboys and also by schoolgirls, I have seen it played in Hebrew in Israel, in Swedish in Finland, in Polish in ruined Warsaw. I have seen German and French, Irish and Canadian Hamlets; I have seen it in a rural Women's Institute with the Lady of the Manor as the Second Gravedigger. Some of these performances, as you may guess, were better than others. But none of them—not one—failed to shed new light upon some aspect of the play, and thence upon some aspect of real life.

I can imagine few more wonderful experiences—and I envy those gifted with the power and the opportunity—than to play Hamlet, to live for three hours in the person of that

infinitely interesting and vivid creature, and *to create him anew in one's own image*. For that is what every performance is—a *re-creation in one's own image* of what Shakespeare has only partly created.

I say partly created because during thirty-five years of theatrical production I have ranged from Hamlet to farce, from the Town Hall, Ballymuck, to the Metropolitan Opera House, New York; and all experiences confirm me in the belief that no one can foretell even approximately what relation the finished article, the performance, will bear to the raw material, the script. You may plan it, and cast it, and rehearse it, with this or that in mind. But a theatrical performance is not merely the sum of its ingredients, it is what the ingredients, working upon one another, sometimes like leaven upon dough, and sometimes I am sorry to say like weedkiller upon weeds, collectively produce.

A Shakespearean production of my own which gave me a happy surprise by turning out something on the lines which I had imagined, only a great deal better, was of *All's Well That Ends Well*. This play has been infrequently done and most of the literary critics dismiss it with cursory and unimaginative comment. The nineteenth century critics didn't care for the heroine because she didn't conform to their own ideas of Womanly Purity. She is a highly intelligent and independent person, a little like the sort of ladies with which Ibsen and Shaw pulverised our grandparents, except that she is quiet; she doesn't bounce and thump and boisterously proclaim her sex's equality with the males. I think from an actress' point of view Helena is easily the best of the younger women's parts in Shakespeare; as interesting as Isabella in *Measure for Measure* but ever so much more sympathetic; as likeable as Rosalind but ever so much more interesting. I can't imagine why more of our gifted actresses have not

insisted upon playing her, and by doing so have taught the public to love this wonderful play.

But I am digressing. The point I am making is this; you can never tell beforehand how things will turn out: this production of *All's Well* had been, as plans go, quite a risky one. It was the first season at the Canadian Stratford Festival and the conservative plan would have been to choose one of the most, instead of one of the least, familiar of the plays. The company was of untried quality and unlikely, in the circumstances to be a very sophisticated one. The play is highly sophisticated, and I planned to do it in modern dress, which paradoxically demands that everything be far more fashionable, elegant and stylish than if a remote period is to be suggested.

To be sure we had Alec Guinness for the King of France and Irene Worth for Helena. Both found the play and the whole Canadian venture highly stimulating, and were moved to give performances of remarkable quality. Guinness was an ailing, but incredibly dignified, charming and humorous Monarch. Miss Worth's Helena was creative acting of the highest quality—womanly without being sentimental, witty without being malicious, intelligent without being governessy. We were enormously helped too by Tanya Moiseiwitsch's designs for the clothes. Predominantly black and grey, they avoided being funereal, and succeeded in being witty, elegant and subtle. From the word 'go' everything seemed to fall into place in the happiest way.

I think that one of the reasons why our production of *All's Well* was a success was because of the way it was dressed. The fact that the characters looked contemporary, or nearly contemporary—we endeavoured to avoid anything recognisably fashionable and to be, as far as possible, timeless—made us all concentrate particularly hard on making them

as real as possible, psychologically plausible. It is rather easy in Shakespeare's Romances to get a bit carried away by the verse and to remove the whole goings-on into a realm where normal human manners and conduct do not operate. I am sure this is a mistake. The romantic stories and high-coloured language must not obscure the fact that the characters are careful and accurate portraits of human beings.

Bertram is an only son, whose father died when he was very young, and who has been brought up very strictly by a devoted mother, extremely intelligent and extremely dominant. Helena is likewise an only child, whose father died when she was very young; but she has no mother. She has to fend for herself. Add to this that Bertram is of a very ancient, noble and wealthy family; whereas Helena's father was a physician, a learned man—an Intellectual as we say now—who naturally left no fortune.

There is the set-up of the love-story. Obviously Helena is going to be the dominant partner; this is going to make her behave in what the Victorian commentators thought a shockingly unladylike, even impure, manner; but a manner which is so true to life, so determined to get her man and yet so unselfish, that the romance is ten times stronger and more interesting than if it were built on the conventional foundation—the strong, handsome, dominant male who woos and wins the weak, pure, helpless, clinging little female.

One other point before we leave *All's Well*. There is a scene where Helena undertakes to cure the King of France, who is sick. They play a strange, interesting little scene together where Helena speaks rhymed verse. If you just read this verse it seems to be doggerel, and, as such, it has earned the scorn of literary critics and the suspicion that it is an interpolation by a hand other than Shakespeare's. But

speaking it aloud. The rhyme and the rather meaningless repetitive words suggest a charm, suggest a hypnotism, suggest exactly what the situation demands, that Helena is beginning to dominate the sick old King by the suprarational suggestion of faith-healing.

On the other hand, I recall a production of mine at the Old Vic which must, I think, have struck an all-time low. The play was *Othello*. The cast was eminent—Ralph Richardson was Othello to the Iago of Laurence Olivier; the supporting team was a very strong one; and I thought I had an interesting and exciting interpretation to offer to the actors. But, alas . . . from earliest days things went awry. Richardson and I couldn't see eye to eye about the meaning of the play or about the means of realizing *Othello*. We compromised amicably as far as our personal relation was concerned, but disastrously for the production. We have since agreed fervently that it would have been far better to have had a hideous rumpus in which one or the other of us had to accept total defeat. Each day of rehearsal we seemed to slide backward instead of forward, further and further from producing anything interesting, exciting or even intelligible.

But this unforeseeable quality, as I said before, is one of the great charms of the theatre. No one can tell, beforehand, even approximately, what the finished work will be like. And the greater the play the more room there is for surprise, the more exciting it is to land somewhere near the bulls-eye.

I think if any conclusion is to be drawn, it is this: don't play safe. Every theatrical production is a gamble. There are far too many unknown and unknowable, factors to make the prudent and safe and obvious way, the wise way. It is nearly always the dull way and in the theatre respectable dullness is death.

Make your production, express what you think the play is about. Every one of Shakespeare's plays concerns important *themes*, quite apart from the story. In general these themes are fairly easy to determine, few people would disagree that the theme of *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, is about Justice versus Mercy; that *Romeo and Juliet* is about young love thwarted; *Othello* about jealousy; *Macbeth* about murder—but that is very general. When you try to be more specific, more detailed, to make a closer analysis, then it becomes far harder to decide just what Shakespeare intends to say. The contradictory and bewildering variety of critical comment shows that—not just the screams from the lunatic fringe but the weighty utterances of redoubtable champions—Malone, Dr. Johnson, Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the leaders of later date—they all offer widely different interpretations. Well, this doesn't mean that any one of them is necessarily wrong, equally it doesn't mean that any one of them is necessarily right. Great art is susceptible to many and widely different interpretations.

Therefore if it's your job to put one of Shakespeare's plays upon the stage, my view is that you should think carefully and deeply what it means to you—here and now, which may be very different from what it meant five years ago when you were a different person in a different context—and express that meaning as best you can, and as boldly as you can. Circumspection doesn't eliminate, doesn't even minimise, the risks of theatrical production. I'd rather be hung for a good powerful, self-confident sheep than a wee half-hearted baa-lamb.

The Comedies

RICHARD DAVID

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON, Boswell's Johnson, has become a byword for sturdy common sense. And Dr. Johnson, in the preface to his edition of the plays of Shakespeare, declared that Shakespeare's true bent was rather towards comedy than tragedy. 'In tragedy,' says Johnson, 'he often writes, with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comick scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. . . . His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.'

Such a statement, even when backed by Dr. Johnson's good sense, may seem hard to swallow today. We are allergic to comedy. Life, we think, is full of strains and stresses, and any writing that ignores them, or even tones them down, can be no more than trifling. Our mood is tragic, and only tragedy, or the bitter ironic comedy that is the counterpart of tragedy, can satisfy that mood. If we agree that Shakespeare is a great writer, it is of the author of *Hamlet* and *Lear* that we are thinking. We don't, on the whole, like *As You Like It*; we can't see how the silly stories on which *The Merchant of Venice* or *Twelfth Night* are based can mean anything; and we are scornful if anyone suggests that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is more than kid stuff.

But if we take this line, it is probably only because we have not grasped the point of comedy. Comedy is just as

serious as tragedy, if by 'serious' we mean concerned with the actual experience of life as we live it. Neither comedy nor tragedy can exist in a vacuum; they inevitably present, each in its own way, their author's sense of values, glorify his favourite virtues, and parade the vices he most detests for at least implicit condemnation. Shakespeare's mind is every bit as apparent in his comedies as in his tragedies. He is against pride, malice, intolerance, the selfishness that is destructive of others and of itself, against any kind of meanness and any kind of affectation. He is for generosity in its widest sense, and for natural vivacity tempered by a good heart and the recognised need for orderly co-operation with others. But whereas in tragedy the moral is more or less directly stated and the author draws us with him to his conclusions, in comedy he presents his case by allusion and comparison and suggestion, and the audience, less engaged but more alert and active, is left to pick up the author's hints for itself. The difference between the two forms is little more than one of method.

Shakespeare's comedies are pre-eminent for two reasons, for the values they present and for the skill of the presentation. The virtues Shakespeare offers for our inspection are convincing virtues, and they apply to a very wide extent of human behaviour. They are presented moreover with remarkable freshness. I am not of course pretending for a moment that Shakespeare's materials, his plots and his stage-devices, are fresh. There is hardly a single play of his that can be called original in this sense. He seems at first sight to have picked up any old plot that came his way, and the sillier and more hackneyed the better. His stage-tricks, even his language, he borrowed from the dramatists who were fashionable when he started writing. Robert Greene had developed a kind of play in which the comedy was shot with

romance. John Lyly had invented a new line in smart talk, a special lingo, almost, that we know as 'Euphuism', full of flowery expressions and far-fetched comparisons, given a formal and affected grace by such devices as alliteration and artificially balanced phrasing. All these conventions Shakespeare borrowed shamelessly. It was with some reason that poor Greene, dying in poverty and disrepute, denounced the up and coming dramatist as 'an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers'. But what Shakespeare borrowed he transformed, giving to the old situations new range and depth, freshening the language and presentation. Where Greene gives us a situation straight, in two-dimensional flatness as it were, Shakespeare makes it stereoscopic, forcing us to see it from many different angles. Lyly's affectations are first exaggerated into hilarious caricature, and then grow out into Shakespeare's own comic style, as extravagant as Lyly's, but flexible where his is rigid, natural where his is artificial, fresh where his is stale.

For instance, the basic material of Berowne's great speech in praise of love from *Love's Labours Lost* consists of what you might almost call poetical clichés, but they are informed by a spirit and vitality and sense of movement that gives the whole speech a lift and makes it not only intensely poetical, but somehow intensely real as well.

Have at you then, affection's men-at-arms:
Consider what you first did swear unto,
To fast, to study, and to see no woman;
Flat treason 'gainst the kingly state of youth.
Say, can you fast? Your stomachs are too young,
And abstinence engenders maladies.
O! we have made a vow to study, lords,
And in that vow we have forsworn our books:
For when would you, my liege, or you, or you,

In leaden contemplation have found out
Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes
Of beauty's tutors have enrich'd you with?
Other slow arts entirely keep the brain,
And therefore, finding barren practisers,
Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil;
But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain,
But, with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power,
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye;
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious head of theft is stopp'd;
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails:
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste.
For valour, is not Love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair;
And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Make heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
O! then his lines would ravish savage ears,
And plant in tyrants mild humility.
From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain, and nourish all the world;
Else none at all in aught proves excellent.
Then fools you were these women to forswear,
Or, keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools.

For wisdom's sake, a word that all men love,
Or for love's sake, a word that loves all men,
Or for men's sake, the author of these women;
Or women's sake, by whom we men are men;
Let us once lose our oaths to find ourselves,
Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths.
It is religion to be thus forsworn;
For charity itself fulfils the law;
And who can sever love from charity?

What matters, you see, is what Shakespeare makes of his materials. What could be more puerile than the story of the Jew who demanded a pound of human flesh in payment of a debt? Only the story of the girl doomed to marry whichever suitor chose the right one out of three caskets. And yet Shakespeare has only to bang them both together, into *The Merchant of Venice*, and they begin to react on each other and between them generate such sparks and excitement as are anything but hackneyed.

It is the same with the stage-tricks. Shakespeare relies on the corniest of devices and situations, but he uses them with such bravado that they spring to life in his hands. Confusion between identical twins is one of the oldest of jokes, but Shakespeare has only to double it, giving us in *The Comedy of Errors* two sets of twins, and it is irresistibly laughable. To have one character eavesdropping on another is a well-proved gag; in *Love's Labour's Lost* A eavesdrops on B who eavesdrops on C who eavesdrops on D. Or take the situation that so delighted Greene—the heroine disguised as a boy. Elizabethan heroines were of course played by boy actors, and there is a sort of comic piquancy in the double masquerade. Shakespeare as usual goes one better and makes the masquerade a treble one; for the 'Rosalind' Orlando jokes with in the *As You Like It* forest is a boy

acting a girl disguised as a boy making-believe to be a girl.

Shakespeare's comic language is a clear symptom of this superabundance of invention. We see it in those lightning exchanges of wisecracks, bubbling over with puns and extravagances, that Shakespeare himself describes as 'sets of wit well played'—between Berowne and Rosaline, Beatrice and Benedick, Rosalind and Orlando. Falstaff is a personification of it, and the glorious ebullience of his language redeems what would otherwise be the least characteristic and most perfunctory of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Here is Falstaff, after having been ducked in the Thames, brooding on the awful fate he has only just escaped, consoling himself with liquor, and indignantly rejecting the barman's offer of so adulterated a drink as egg-nog.

FALSTAFF: Bardolph, I say,—

BARDOLPH: Here, sir.

FALSTAFF: Go fetch me a quart of sack; put a toast in 't.

Have I lived to be carried in a basket, like a barrow of butcher's offal, and to be thrown in the Thames? Well, if I be served such another trick, I'll have my brains ta'en out, and buttered, and give them to a dog for a new-year's gift. The rogues slighted me into the river with as little remorse as they would have drowned a blind bitch's puppies, fifteen i' the litter: and you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking; if the bottom were as deep as hell, I should down. I had been drowned, but that the shore was shelvy and shallow—a death that I abhor; for the water swells a man; and what a thing should I have been when I had been swelled! I should have been a mountain of mummy.

BARDOLPH: Here, sir.

FALSTAFF: Come, let me pour in some sack to the Thames water; for my belly's as cold as if I had swallowed snow-balls for pills to cool the reins. . . . Take away these chalices. Go brew me a pottle of sack finely.

BARDOLPH: With eggs, sir?

FALSTAFF: Simple of itself; I'll no pullet-sperm in my brewage. What relish is in "a kind of alacrity in sinking" or 'a mountain of mummy'? Yet it is not the words only; they are but the outward flourishes of a fresh and exuberant fancy, working, inventing, elaborating continuously and richly. Every Shakespearean comedy has this extraordinary verve and vitality from first to last. Even the endings, which we are sometimes inclined to dismiss as perfunctory, with their hasty knotting-up of loose ends and marrying-off of assorted couples—even these endings are, I think, a part of the joke.

The vitality and freshness of Shakespeare's imagination is manifested also in the variety of his comedy. There are always so many things going on in these plays, and all of different kinds: grave justles gay, low life sets off high life and the town the country, and the real comments on the ideal. We have seen how in *The Merchant of Venice* the two very different stories fertilize each other. The same thing happens in *Much Ado About Nothing*, with the tragedy of Claudio's brutal treatment of his bride, the farce of Dogberry and Verges, and the high comedy of Beatrice and Benedick. *Twelfth Night*, again, depends for its special flavour on the mixing of apparently incompatible ingredients, romance and clowning, pathos and satire. In the later plays the grave tends to gain on the gay. *Measure for Measure* is for the most part nearer to tears than to laughter, and even in *Twelfth Night* the foolery has something of an autumnal air. But no plunge into seriousness is more sudden or more deep than that of one of the earliest of the comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost*, where, just as the fun is at its fastest and most furious it is interrupted, frozen, by the appearance at the back of the stage of a solitary figure in black. It is the messenger come to tell the Princess that her father is dead.

And instantly we are brought down to earth, which seems all the more solid and actual for our previous ride in the clouds.

Such shifts and contrasts are a hall-mark of Shakespearean comedy. We are constantly, within the space of a single speech, being plunged into sobriety and then whisked out again. In *Much Ado*, Beatrice, in the midst of a still-bantering exchange with Benedick, can suddenly knock the wind out of him (and the audience) with the passionate injunction, 'Kill Claudio!' I confess I get the same sort of thrill from Rosalind's *cri de coeur* to Celia, in *As You Like It*, even though it is uttered half-laughingly and she returns at once to raillery: 'O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love!' For the moment the play swerves into reality. Another, more extended example, which will also give you a taste of Shakespeare's lyrical quality, is the famous scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, where Lorenzo and Jessica, alone in the moonlit garden at Belmont, await their hosts' return. They begin romantically, deviate into playfulness, are interrupted by the vociferous clown Gobbo, and relapse into poetry. Here it is:

LORENZO: The moon shines bright: in such a night as this,
 When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
 And they did make no noise, in such a night
 Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
 And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
 Where Cressid lay that night.

JESSICA: In such a night
 Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew,
 And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
 And ran dismay'd away.

LORENZO: In such a night
 Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
 Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love
 To come again to Carthage.

JESSICA: In such a night
Medea gather'd the enchanted herbs
That did renew old Aeson.

LORENZO: In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
As far as Belmont.

JESSICA: In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith
And ne'er a true one.

LORENZO: In such a night
Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,
Slander her love, and he forgave it her.

JESSICA: I would out-night you, did no body come;
But, hark, I hear the footing of a man....

LAUNCELOT: Sola, sola! wo ha, ho! sola, sola!

LORENZO: Who calls?

LAUNCELOT: Sola! did you see Master Lorenzo? Master
Lorenzo, sola, sola!

LORENZO: Leave hollaing, man: here.

LAUNCELOT: Sola! where? where?

LORENZO: Here.

LAUNCELOT: Tell him there's a post come from my master,
with his horn full of good news: my master will be here ere
morning.

LORENZO: Sweet soul, let's in, and there expect their coming.
And yet no matter: why should we go in?....
How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

But not only is each play composed of a series of different moods, balancing and contrasting. Shakespeare loves to introduce within each mood a wealth of variations and counterpoints. For instance we have, in *As You Like It*, Silvius and Phebe, the conventional shepherd and shepherdess of romance, and the real shepherd, Corin, practical and earthy, as well as Touchstone, Rosalind, and Celia, who are playing at shepherds. This juggling with different degrees of reality is a favourite ploy of Shakespeare and gives depth to his comedy. In this, too, lies the point of that elaboration of artifice I spoke of earlier, the eavesdroppers one outside the other like a box of boxes, the double and triple masquerade. Here, to end with, is the scene between Rosalind and Orlando, which contains, to my mind, the whole essence of Shakespearean comedy, its extravagance and its humanity, its gaiety and its sudden solemnities, the shimmer of it as it hovers between pretence and actuality. The disguised Rosalind speaks first to Orlando, who comes late for his appointment. The other speaker is Rosalind's cousin Celia.

ROSALIND: Why, how now, Orlando! where have you been all this while? You a lover! An you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more.

ORLANDO: My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise.

ROSALIND: Break an hour's promise in love? He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid hath clapped him o' th' shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole.

ORLANDO: Pardon me, dear Rosalind.

ROSALIND: Nay, an you be so tardy come no more in my sight; I had as lief be wooed of a snail.

ORLANDO: Of a snail?

ROSALIND: Ay, of a snail; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head; a better jointure, I think, than you make a woman: besides, he brings his destiny with him.

ORLANDO: What's that?

ROSALIND: Why, horns; which such as you are fain to be beholding to your wives for: but he comes armed in his fortune, and prevents the slander of his wife.

ORLANDO: Virtue is no horn-maker . . . and my Rosalind is virtuous.

ROSALIND: And I am your Rosalind.

CELIA: It pleases him to call you so; but he hath a Rosalind of a better leer than you.

ROSALIND: Come, woo me, woo me; for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent . . . What would you say to me now, an I were your very very Rosalind?

ORLANDO: I would kiss before I spoke.

ROSALIND: Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss: very good orators, when they are out, they will spit, and for lovers, lacking (God warr'nt us!) matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss.

ORLANDO: How if the kiss be denied?

ROSALIND: Then she puts you to entreaty and there begins new matter.

ORLANDO: Who could be out, being before his beloved mistress?

ROSALIND: Marry, that should you if I were your mistress, or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit.

ORLANDO: What, of my suit?

ROSALIND: Not out of your apparel, and yet out of your suit . . . Am not I your Rosalind?

ORLANDO: I take some joy to say you are, because I would be talking of her.

ROSALIND: Well, in her person, I say I will not have you.

ORLANDO: Then in mine own person, I die.

ROSALIND: No, faith, die by attorney: the poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love-cause: Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love: Leander, he would have lived many a fair year, though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night; for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont and being taken with the cramp was drowned, and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was 'Hero of Sestos' . . . But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

ORLANDO: I would not have my right Rosalind of this mind, for I protest her frown might kill me.

ROSALIND: By this hand, it will not kill a fly . . . But come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition; and ask me what you will, I will grant it.

ORLANDO: Then love me, Rosalind.

ROSALIND: Yes, faith will I, Fridays and Saturdays and all.

ORLANDO: And wilt thou have me?

ROSALIND: Ay, and twenty such.

ORLANDO: What sayest thou?

ROSALIND: Are you not good?

ORLANDO: I hope so.

ROSALIND: Why then, can one desire too much of a good thing? Come, sister, you shall be the priest and marry us. . . . Give me your hand, Orlando . . . What do you say, sister?

ORLANDO: Pray thee, marry us.

CELIA: I cannot say the words.

ROSALIND: You must begin, 'Will you, Orlando'—

CELIA: Go to . . . Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?

ORLANDO: I will.

ROSALIND: Ay, but when?

ORLANDO: Why now, as fast as she can marry us.

ROSALIND: Then you must say, 'I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.'

ORLANDO: I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.

ROSALIND: I might ask you for your commission, but I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband. . . . There's a girl goes before the priest, and certainly a woman's thought runs before her actions.

ORLANDO: So do all thoughts, they are winged.

ROSALIND: Now tell me how long you would have her after you have possessed her.

ORLANDO: For ever and a day.

ROSALIND: Say 'a day' without the 'ever' . . . No, no, Orlando, men are April when they woo, December when they wed; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. . . . I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey: I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyen, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.

ORLANDO: But will my Rosalind do so?

ROSALIND: But my life, she will do as I do.

ORLANDO: O, but she is wise.

ROSALIND: Or else she could not have the wit to do this: the wiser, the waywarder: make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out at the key-hole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney.

ORLANDO: A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say 'Wit, whither wilt?'

ROSALIND: Nay, you might keep that check for it, till you met your wife's wit going to your neighbour's bed.

ORLANDO: And what wit could wit have to excuse that?

ROSALIND: Marry, to say she came to seek you there . . . You shall never take her without her answer, unless you take her without her tongue: O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool.

ORLANDO: For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee.

ROSALIND: Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours!

ORLANDO: I must attend the duke at dinner. By two o'clock I will be with thee again.

ROSALIND: Ay, go your ways, go your ways; I knew what you would prove, my friends told me as much, and I thought no less: that flattering tongue of yours won me: 'tis but one cast away, and so, come death . . . Two o'clock is your hour?

ORLANDO: Ay, sweet Rosalind.

ROSALIND: By my troth, and in good earnest, and so God mend me, and by all pretty oaths that are not dangerous, if you break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathological break-promise, and the most hollow lover, and the most unworthy of her you call Rosalind, that may be chosen out of the gross band of the unfaithful: therefore beware my censure, and keep your promise.

ORLANDO: With no less religion than if thou wert indeed my Rosalind: so adieu.

ROSALIND: Well, Time is the old justice that examines all such offenders, and let Time try: adieu!

CELIA: You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate: we must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest.

ROSALIND: O coz, coz, coz . . . my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it

cannot be sounded; my affection hath an unknown bottom,
like the bay of Portugal.

CELIA: Or rather, bottomless—that as fast as you pour affection
in, it runs out.

ROSALIND: No, that same wicked bastard of Venus, that was
begot of thought, conceived of spleen, and born of madness—
that blind rascally boy that abuses every one's eyes because
his own are out—let him be judge how deep I am in love . . .

I'll tell thee, Aliena, I cannot be out of the sight of Orlando:
I'll go find a shadow and sigh till he come.

CELIA: And I'll sleep.

The Histories

HELEN MORRIS

THE oddest thing about Shakespeare, it seems to me, is that people sometimes forget that he wrote plays. There is so much poetry and philosophy and psychology in his writings that it is easy to forget that he wrote for the stage—plays, not things to be read alone in a study or taught in a class-room, but to be acted in public, to be seen and heard. The effect is quite different. If you read *Richard II*, for instance, you will be fascinated by the psychology of Shakespeare's king, and enchanted by the poetry of his speeches; you will feel that he is the hero of the play. But the day before the Earl of Essex rebelled against Queen Elizabeth, his friends bribed the players to act *Richard II*, so that Londoners might actually see that it was possible to replace a weak and vacillating ruler by a strong and capable nobleman.

Perhaps because most traditional acting was of Bible stories, Elizabethan audiences were apt to regard plays as truthful, indeed, instructive. So the acting of abdication, or rebellion, might put dangerous ideas into people heads, and the censor was quick to crack down on dangerous thinking. 'Leave out insurrection wholly and the cause thereof, at your own perils', wrote the censor on the script of a play about Sir Thomas More.

In the first nervous and uncertain years of Elizabeth's reign, it was much safer to write of Romans and Egyptians than to dabble in English history. But during the 1580s open

war with Spain united the opposing English factions, and victory over the Armada brought a great upsurge of nationalism and patriotic feeling, often expressed by Shakespeare. Confidently:

BASTARD: This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.

Again tenderly:

GAUNT: This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England . . .

People sometimes complain that the women in Shakespeare's history plays are either negligible or else viragoes. 'Here comes the Queen,' says a noble lord, 'I'll steal away'; and the king replies, 'Exeter, so will I'. But surely the heroine of all the history plays is England—described with love, with admiration, with devotion, by all sorts and conditions of men.

Shakespeare found plots to match the popular mood in the Chronicles of Hall and Holinshed. These Tudor propagandists had already retold fifteenth century English

history as a kind of moral drama, from the murder of Richard II to the 'triumphant reign' of Henry VIII. There is a hero king—a shining example—Henry V, whose 'victorious acts' are contrasted with the 'tragical doings' of the villain, Richard III, whose reign is treated as a sort of 'cautionary tale'. The murder of Richard II was sacrilegious, for kings were divinely appointed, God's vice-regents. 'Blood must have blood', and there followed a hundred years of tumult and rebellion, culminating in the Wars of the Roses. The story ended happily, with the accession of the Lancastrian Henry Tudor as Henry VII; he married Elizabeth of York, red rose and white joined in the great double rose of the Tudors, and a golden age was ushered in. Perhaps it is worth while noting that Shakespeare cautiously stopped at this point, the accession of Queen Elizabeth's grandfather. The Queen had been dead for ten years before he wrote a play about her father, Henry VIII.

Whether or not all this is true history doesn't matter; this was the accepted version of events, and any alterations made by Shakespeare can be explained by remembering, once more, that he was writing *plays*—he contracts long drawn out campaigns, or juggles with the ages of characters, for dramatic reasons. Hotspur was in fact over twenty years older than Prince Hal, but it makes a better play to have them about the same age.

Can we tell, from these plays about politics, what were Shakespeare's own political views? Conservatives have claimed him as 'a Tory and a gentleman', yet a Czech communist recently hailed him as 'our fellow-worker, Shakespeare'. Yet again the answer is that Shakespeare wrote *plays*, in which rich and poor, high and low, express their individual beliefs, and it is nonsense to take a remark made by one of Shakespeare's characters and say 'Shakespeare

said that, Shakespeare believed this'. We just don't know what he believed.

However, the plays do show clearly one basic difference between the Elizabethan attitude and our own. We accept, indeed we expect, a chaotic world. But to Shakespeare's contemporaries, chaos was wrong and unnatural.

The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place . . .

God had established a material and spiritual hierarchy. Each angel and man and beast had his own proper place, and each was an essential link in the great chain of being. Rebellion, therefore, upsetting this order, was a sin, quite literally a 'damn'd commotion'. Mortimer, describing Hotspur's rebel forces, knows they were:

But shadows and the shows of men to fight;
For that same word, rebellion, did divide
The action of their bodies from their souls;
And they did fight with queasiness . . .

And no one on either side doubts that 'the due meet for rebellion' is instant execution.

A child must obey his father, a subject his king. But obligation worked both ways, and the father was responsible for his child, the king for his subjects—the higher the position the greater the responsibility—

. . . what infinite heart's ease
Must kings neglect that private men enjoy.

Henry V, disguised, discusses the whole problem with some common soldiers, sitting round a campfire in the small hours just before the battle of Agincourt. Many people who see the play, of course, remember most vividly the King's 'fighting' speeches, such as this:

HENRY V: Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead!
In peace, there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let it pry through the portage of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit
To his full height! On, on, you noblest English!
Whose blood is fetched from fathers of war-proof;
Fathers that like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn to even fought,
And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument.
Dishonour not your mothers, now attest
That those whom you call fathers did beget you.
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit; and, upon this charge
Cry ' God for Harry, England and Saint George! '

Yes, that's stirring and exciting in the theatre, but what's the reaction of the soldiers who have to do the actual fighting?

Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety.

The king has another panegyric on the glories of battle:

And gentlemen in England, now a-bed,
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here;
And hold their manhoods cheap, whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day.

But is war really like this? At once Shakespeare shows us sordid reality—cowardly Pistol bullying a French knight for ransom. And we are told about the shabby reasons which make the bishops urge the king to war, and about the devastated countryside in war-shattered France. Kings and nobles may indulge in heroics, but Shakespeare also shows us the common people, shows us Falstaff recruiting the poorest and weediest countrymen, who can't afford to bribe him to let them go. Those not killed fighting return home crippled, 'to beg during life'.

'Honour' is a key-word in the histories—what is 'honour'? As usual, Shakespeare gives us every side of the argument. The king of France urges on his princes with 'the spirit of honour', the king of England dearly covets 'honour'—yet the French murder the unarmed boys and camp followers, and Henry orders his men to kill their prisoners, and threatens a brutal and barbaric sacking of Harfleur. Wild impulsive Hotspur is 'the theme of honour's tongue', is called 'the king of honour', lives for 'honour'—but to Falstaff—well just listen to him.

FALSTAFF: Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? how then?

Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? a word. What is that word, honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. It is insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it: honour is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism.

In the first history plays Shakespeare wrote—the ones about Henry VI and Richard III—the common people appear only as impersonal symbols. A father kills a son; a son kills a father; this is what civil war is like. Again, common or garden gardeners are brought on, and compare the kingdom to a neglected garden, but take no further part in the play.

But in *Henry IV* Shakespeare began to show us common people who are individuals. Some of them still have symbolic names—Doll Tearsheet and Jane Nightwork, the rustics Feeble, Mouldy and Shadow, Justice Shallow and his cousin Silence. But they live their own individual lives. We glimpse life in a London tavern, flea-bitten carriers in a country pub, highway robbery in Kent, country folk being forcibly enlisted in the army, a country gentleman taking his ease in his orchard or managing his estate, paying the blacksmith's bill for shoeing and plough-irons, discussing the price of a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair, and arranging to sow the headland with wheat—'with red wheat, Davy'.

Kings and nobles may quarrel and separate and unite and fight and rebel in the foreground. All the time in the background, ordinary life goes on.

To crown all, in his historical plays Shakespeare created

the great figure of Sir John Falstaff, the most popular character in the Elizabethan theatre.

The awkward thing was that Falstaff wouldn't stay in the background. He began to loom larger than the noblemen; Falstaff's scenes occupy twice as much space in the second part of *Henry IV* as they do in the first, and indeed he dominates the play—so that Falstaff had to be killed off before Shakespeare could write the next play, the 'victorious acts' of King Henry V.

Shakespeare shows us Falstaff cheating, stealing, lying, taking bribes, bragging, whoring—and yet, miraculously, nine out of ten people leave the theatre feeling attracted to the gross old knight, and bitterly indignant about his rejection by the new King. Feasting in Justice Shallow's orchard, Falstaff hears of Henry the Fifth's accession: he sweeps his companions off to London, like this:

FALSTAFF: What! is the old king dead? . . . Away, Bardolph, saddle my horse. Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, 'tis thine. Pistol, I will double-charge thee with dignities. . . . Master Shallow, my Lord Shallow, be what thou wilt, I am Fortune's steward. Get on thy boots, we'll ride all night. O sweet Pistol! Away, Bardolph! Come Pistol, utter more to me; and withal devise something to do thyself good. Boot, boot, Master Shallow, I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses; the laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they which have been my friends, and woe unto my lord chief justice!

Relying on his long friendship and familiarity with the Prince, Falstaff hastens to greet his 'royal Hal', his 'sweet boy', his 'king', his 'Jove', his 'heart'—but he is ruthlessly turned off—'I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers'. His function is over. He has played a vital part

in the education of Prince Hal, but is no fit companion for a crowned king.

Falstaff was the first of Shakespeare's characters to be written about as if he were a real man. This happened in 1777 and ever since then pundits have exhausted themselves explaining him. Is Falstaff a father-substitute, while Prince Hal and his father are on bad terms? Is he the sacrifice killed at a new king's accession, or the dying-god of the anthropologists? Is he the old Vice from the morality plays, the mischief-maker, the devil's advocate?

Be all that as it may, there *is* a clear parable in these plays. Prince Hal, like Everyman—or Everyprince—must choose his way of life. First he must choose between honour and dishonour in war; will he imitate gallant Hotspur or old Falstaff, who shams dead to avoid a fight, and whose bravest feat is to stab a dead man. The Prince chooses honour, and practises it on the field at Shrewsbury. But a king must have civic virtues too. So Prince Hal has to choose again, between Order and Justice on the one hand and Disorder and Anarchy on the other, that is, between the Lord Chief Justice who was bold enough to imprison even the Prince of Wales, when the Prince broke the law, and Falstaff, liar, cheat, anarchist. The Prince chooses Justice—and breaks Falstaff's heart.

This indeed has been foreshadowed in the scene when Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice come face to face. Listen to it now and listen not only for the argument but to the way it is written.

We all know Shakespeare is the best English poet, but it is arguable that he also wrote the best English prose. Falstaff's gusto, his wit, his warmth, his invention, his out-size humanity are irresistibly conveyed by the rhythm of his speech.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: What's he that goes there?

SERVANT: Falstaff, an't please your lordship.

L. C. J.: He that was in question for the robbery?

SERVANT: He my lord; but he hath since done good service at Shrewsbury, and, as I hear, is now going with some charge to the Lord John of Lancaster.

L. C. J.: What, to York? Call him back again.

SERVANT: Sir John Falstaff!

FALSTAFF: Boy, tell him I am deaf.

PAGE: You must speak louder, my master is deaf.

L. C. J.: I am sure he is, to the hearing of anything good. Go, pluck him by the elbow; I must speak with him.

SERVANT: Sir John!

FALSTAFF: What! a young knave, and beg! Is there not wars? is there not employment? doth not the king lack subjects? do not the rebels want soldiers? Though it be a shame to be on any side but one, it is worse shame to beg than to be on the worst side, were it worse than the name of rebellion can tell how to make it.

SERVANT: You mistake me, sir.

FALSTAFF: Why, sir, did I say you were an honest man? setting my knighthood and my soldiership aside, I had lied in my throat if I had said so.

SERVANT: I pray you, sir, then set your knighthood and your soldiership aside, and give me leave to tell you that you lie in your throat if you say I am any other than an honest man.

FALSTAFF: I give thee leave to tell me so! I say aside that which grows to me! If thou gett'st any leave of me, hang me: if thou takest leave, thou wert better be hanged. You hunt-counter: hence! avaunt!

SERVANT: Sir, my lord would speak with you.

L. C. J.: Sir John Falstaff, a word with you.

FALSTAFF: My good lord! God give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship abroad; I heard say your lordship was sick: I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice. Your lordship, though not clean past your

youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltness of time; and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverend care of your health.

L. C. J.: Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.

FALSTAFF: An't please your lordship, I hear his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

L. C. J.: I talk not of his majesty. You would not come when I sent for you.

FALSTAFF: And I hear, moreover, his highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy.

L. C. J.: Well, heaven mend him! I pray you, let me speak with you.

FALSTAFF: This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of lethargy, an't please your lordship; a kind of sleeping in the blood, a whoreson tingling.

L. C. J.: What tell you me of it? be that as it is.

FALSTAFF: It has its original from much grief, from study and perturbation of the brain. I have read the cause of his effects in Galen: it is a kind of deafness.

L. C. J.: I think you are fallen into the disease, for you hear not what I say to you.

FALSTAFF: Very well, my lord, very well: rather, an't please you, it is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal.

L. C. J.: To punish you by the heels would amend the attention of your ears; and I care not if I do become your physician.

FALSTAFF: I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not so patient: your lordship may minister the potion of imprisonment to me in respect of poverty; but how I should be your patient to follow your prescriptions, the wise may make some dram of a scruple, or indeed a scruple itself.

L. C. J.: I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life, to come speak with me.

FALSTAFF: As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service, I did not come.

L. C. J.: Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy.

FALSTAFF: He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less.

L. C. J.: Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

FALSTAFF: I would it were other wise: I would my means were greater and my waist slenderer.

L.C.J.: You have misled the youthful prince.

FALSTAFF: The young prince hath misled me: I am the fellow with the great belly, and he my dog.

L.C.J.: Well, I am loath to gall a new-healed wound: your day's service at Shrewsbury hath a little gilded over your night's exploit on Gadshill: you may thank the unquiet time for your quiet o'er-posting that action.

FALSTAFF: My lord!

L.C.J.: But since all is well, keep it so: wake not a sleeping wolf.

FALSTAFF: To wake a wolf is as bad as to smell a fox.

L.C.J.: What! you are as a candle, the better part burnt out.

FALSTAFF: A wassail candle, my lord; all tallow: if I did say of wax, my growth would approve the truth.

L.C.J.: There is not a white hair on your face but should have his effect of gravity.

FALSTAFF: His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy.

L.C.J.: You follow the young prince up and down, like his ill angel.

FALSTAFF: Not so, my lord; your ill angel is light, but I hope he that looks upon me will take me without weighing: and yet, in some respects, I grant, I cannot go, I cannot tell. Virtue is of so little regard in these costermonger times that true valour is turned bear-herd: pregnancy is made a tapster, and hath his quick wit wasted in giving reckonings: all the other gifts appertinent to man, as the malice of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry. You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young; you measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls; and we that are in the vaward of our youth, I must confess, are wags too.

L.C.J.: Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity, and will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

FALSTAFF: My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white had, and something a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with hollaing, and singing of anthems. To approve my youth further, I will not: the truth is, I am only old in judgment and understanding; and he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him! For the box o' the ear that the prince gave you, he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord. I have checked him for it, and the young lion repents; marry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack.

L.C.J.: Well, God send the prince a better companion!

FALSTAFF: God send the companion a better prince! I cannot rid my hands of him.

L.C.J.: Well, the king hath severed you and Prince Harry. I hear you are going with Lord John of Lancaster against the archbishop and the Earl of Northumberland.

FALSTAFF: Yea; I thank your pretty sweet wit for it. But look you pray, all you that kiss my lady Peace at home, that our armies join not in a hot day; for, by the Lord, I take but two shirts out with me, and I mean not to sweat extraordinarily: if it be a hot day, and I brandish anything but my bottle, I would I might never spit white again. There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head but I am thrust upon it. Well, I cannot last ever. But it was always yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common. If you will needs say I am an old man, you should give me rest. I would to God my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is: I were better to be eaten to

death with rust than to be scoured to nothing with perpetual motion.

L.C.J.: Well, be honest, be honest; and God bless your expedition.

FALSTAFF: Will your lordship lend me a thousand pound to furnish me forth?

L.C.J.: Not a penny; not a penny; you are too impatient to bear crosses. Fare you well: commend me to my cousin Westmoreland.

FALSTAFF: If I do, fillip me with a three-man beetle. A man can no more separate age and covetousness than he can part young limbs and lechery; but the gout galls the one, and the pox pinches the other; and so both the degrees prevent my curses. Boy!

PAGE: Sir!

FALSTAFF: What money is in my purse?

PAGE: Seven groats and twopence.

FALSTAFF: I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse: borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable. Go and bear this letter to my Lord of Lancaster; this to the prince; this to the Earl of Westmoreland; and this to old Mistress Ursula, whom I have weekly sworn to marry since I perceived the first white hair on my chin. About it: you know where to find me. A pox of this gout! or, a gout of this pox! for the one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe. 'Tis no matter if I do halt; I have the wars for my colour, and my pension shall seem the more reasonable. A good wit will make use of anything; I will turn diseases to commodity.

The Tragedies

JOHN F. DANBY

THE first thing one must say about Shakespeare's tragedies is that they don't reflect a mood—that is to say Shakespeare does not feel 'tragic' one day and 'comic' the next. Great art doesn't emerge from moods. Moods are vague and simple. Great art is neither simple nor vague. Shakespeare's tragedies are the outcome of (at least) a ten years' concern, a maturing of the silent strife of the dramatist which has led him further and further into the full human situation—further maybe than any other dramatist who has written.

A second thing also needs to be said. Tragedy confronts us with the great pressures, or tensions, or even mysteries, of life. In responding to tragedy we are exposed in a way we are not exposed when 'enjoying' other forms of art! (How can one *enjoy King Lear*?) The tragedian is a man who has also been himself exposed: and the wound he probes is one we also might come upon. It is not something he is only imagining, it is something that is somehow real. Tragedy has got to be felt as near to the facts of existence. It is no more a faked-up attitude to life than it is a mood.

Let us think of a Shakespearean example: Lear's eldest daughter is talking to her husband—

GONERIL: This man hath had good counsel. A hundred knights!

'Tis politic and safe to let him keep

At point a hundred knights! Yes, that on every dream,

Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy . . .

ALBANY: Well, you may fear too far.

GONERIL: Safer than trust too far.

Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken.

These are modern statesmen discussing the basic attitudes that decide the common texture of the life of ordinary man: shall we trust or shall we fear too far? How would we decide, not if we were Albany or Goneril, but the heads of modern states? Great tragedy makes us realize these choices as things very near to us. We are exposed, we are open, to all that can have to be decided or suffered.

I have used a topical parallel between Albany and Goneril and modern statesmen. This is to help me make a third point. The great dramatist who is confronting life in its most awkward and puzzling forms is able to do so because of the schooling he has had from life itself. The pressures he deals with are real. He is a sensitive recorder of the tremors that run through, threaten, and shake his world. Shakespeare himself knew this. In *Hamlet* he insists that players are 'the abstract and brief chronicle of the time.' And Shakespeare's time was an age very much like ours: an age of transition, when things were breaking and things were making, one in which men were aware of the several layers of the world that were being disturbed or faulted. Shakespeare's age was transitional economically, socially, politically, and intellectually. At every level men were being shaken. And the form and pressure of the time imposed on Shakespeare his great tragic theme. The important function of the imagination is not to dream about what cannot exist—the world of the Great Rock Candy Mountains. Its important

function is to be the organ for handling what might, what can and does, and maybe will exist: the potentials of experience.

One last general remark about the tragedies. They all have to do with a hero who is assailed by forces greater (for good or evil) than he contains in himself, and the full nature of which he does not know until it is too late—when both his ignorance and his knowledge drop away into death, giving us a strange experience of both loss and fulfilment.

But let us pass from these generalisations—however important—to particular cases: Hamlet's, Lear's.

Prince Hamlet suffers the shock of finding that he is alone in a universe of enthroned corruption, to which (and the choice is thrust upon him) he is opposed. He has lived his life thinking that things are so: he awakes to the tragic world where it appears they are not so. His mother is not an ideal but a wanton. The ideal (his father) is dead. On the throne is his father's murderer and his mother's lover—a villain impregably placed as far as this world (or maybe any world) is concerned: an arch-hypocrite, an arch-imposer of false seemings . . . and yet, an adored husband and an efficient king. Behind the situation is the big query that Hamlet voices: is life really like this? or on terms like these really endurable?

HAMLET: O! that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew;
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world.
 Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
 But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:

So excellent a king; that was, to this,
 Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
 Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on; and yet, within a month,
 Let me not think on't: Frailty, thy name is woman!
 A little month; or ere those shoes were old
 With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears; why she, even she,—
 O god! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
 Would have mourn'd longer,—married with mine uncle
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules: within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
 She married. O! most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets.
 It is not nor it cannot come to good;
 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

The play, however, never fully answers the questions it raises. Shakespeare invokes Providence in this play to bridge the gaps revealed to Hamlet's consciousness between the ideal that is wished and the real that makes the wished-for impossible. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will'. Hamlet remains a baffled (we would nowadays call him an angry) young man. It is left to Horatio to sum up what seems to have been the purport of the whole play. Over the holocaust of dead bodies at the end, among the welter of accident and miscalculation he says:

. . . give order that these bodies
 High on a stage be placed to the view;

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about; so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And, in the upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on the inventors' heads.

Hamlet is not, I think, Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. It is rich, with an embarrassment of riches, but also confusing. (That is why we can have so many and so conflictingly different versions of it, as one actor after another seizes the opportunity to be 'new' rather than 'true'.) Horatio's conclusion begs any real conclusion. Surely the presiding Providence doesn't manipulate human inconscience and human suffering in this particular way to ends like these that human beings can neither intend nor expect! Human suffering may be part of a divine and loving comedy—but the actors in the divine comedy should somehow will the means and the end, should somehow participate in the great 'Yes!' to life that tragedy says. Spiritually, as well as dramatically, the play doesn't (shall I say, for me) add up.

Hamlet is a vast nebular mass from which the more and more ordered universe of the succeeding tragedies crystallizes. The final crystallization is *King Lear*. Let us pass by way of contrast and culmination to this greatest of the tragedies: not forgetting the long process of ordering that precedes it: *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and so on.

King Lear crowns the tragic period. All Shakespeare's main concerns find in it their fullest statement and their proper balance with each other. What are some of these concerns, if we can state them shortly and without doing violence to their subtlety and fine inter-relation?

One of the chief is that of Appearance and Reality: the

puzzle of simple goodness confronted by the pleated cunning of the hypocrite—the hypocrite who can *act* goodness more convincingly than really good people can *be* good. In *Hamlet* it is Claudius who can ‘smile and smile and be a villain’; in *Othello* honest Iago plays the role. Iago makes white seem black—and his victim is a blackamore whose marriage to the golden Desdemona should have proved, of all things, that only in love is there certainty beyond the surfaces of black and white. In *Macbeth* it is the Witches who play upon man’s innate propensity to be self-tempted and self-deceived. *King Lear*, of course, starts with a situation where the only good daughter of three appears to her father in a false light. The hypocritical and really wicked sisters steal Cordelia’s words: what words has Cordelia left when it comes to her turn to say how much she loves her father?—None at all. She can only say ‘Nothing!’ So the good is made to appear wicked and the wicked usurp the place of goodness, the highest centres of power in the state, just as Claudius did in *Hamlet*. We are in fact where we were at the beginning of *Hamlet*—only the outworking of the problems is different.

In *Hamlet* the hero pits his wits against the cunning machiavels who would ensnare him. He hoists the engineers by their own petard. His aim is to outdo them in cunning. It was in *Othello* maybe that Shakespeare decided goodness cannot use the weapons of the wicked: simple truth must run its own risks, the risks its essential vulnerability carries with it. Goodness must still be itself, even when the hypocrite is wearing the visor of virtue: as Shakespeare proclaims in *Macbeth*:

Angels are bright still though the brightest fell.
 Though all things foul should wear the brows of grace
 Yet grace must still look so.

In *King Lear* the grand strategy for goodness is seen clearly: it is flight rather than fight . . . flight, as in Edgar's case, or suffering and the discovery of Patience, as in Lear's and in Gloucester's. Something the head cannot puzzle out but which the heart can come to know. This something is found through suffering rather than through cheap victory over those who would wrongfully wound us (remember the putting out of Gloucester's eyes). The policy for goodness, in *King Lear*, is to be patient—to wait, to endure, to achieve charity. 'We must be patient', Lear says, in a lucid moment of his madness, to the blinded Gloucester. And Edgar too says to Gloucester:

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither,
Ripeness is all.

Out of the evil men do will come pain—pain to themselves and others. Out of the right acceptance of suffering and the awareness it brings with it to those who (unlike Edmund, Goneril, and Regan) are not self-insulated against it, will come sweetness.

Lear then, at the beginning of the play commits a great, stupid wrong. He throws away Cordelia (the image of truth) and his kingdom too. He hopes for a juvenile kind of retirement with his calculating elder daughters. He wants a Coney Island in his old age—he and his hundred knights. Of course Goneril and Regan object. Who could put up with the riot and dissoluteness of an old man's Coney Island?

But out of this great stupid octagenarian a man is generated, a man aware of all the human values his way of life has hitherto shut him out from. And it is suffering that opens his eyes. On the Heath, having experienced the worst the

human environment can do to a man (daughters hurting you as only they intimately can) and exposed also to the 'elements'—the non-human Thunder—and beyond the Thunder the thought that maybe the universe does not care for the pain its constitution obviously includes—in the midst of all this, Lear prays: his prayer marks the summit of his sanity, self-awareness, and charity:

LEAR: Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er ye are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.

I never know quite what these last words mean: 'and show the heavens more just'. What I do know is that this is the supreme moment of Lear's sanity and charity: the two together. Maybe also it is one of those 'cleavage points' in the play like the one we have already noticed in connection with Goneril and Albany. The prayer, as I have said, voices a complete charity. The last line leaves it open as to whether the charity must be done in defiance or in fulfilment of the universe's inmost law. I am sure, anyway, that this prayer is more central for Shakespeare's main attitude than that purely sadistic text Victorian agnostics extracted from the play when trying to enlist the dramatist on their side:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods.
They kill us for their sport.

King Lear is no fly. And 'sport'—either of gods or men—is not what his tragedy is about, however we read it.

It is part of the terrifying swaying rhythm of the play

that after the great moment of sanity Lear is hurled again into the storm, and goes mad.

The madness scenes are famous, of course. In them every denial of human hope is expressed (the ultimate of darkness), and—again—every hoped-for human fulfilment is wished for. The most heartrending moment is when these two things meet each other, almost personified as it were. The blinded Gloucester finds his King, and momentarily the mad King recognises him:

LEAR: If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes;
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester:
Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We waul and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

GLOUCESTER: Alack! Alack the day!

LEAR: When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. This' a good block!
It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
A troop of horse with felt; I'll put it in proof,
And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

The opposite poles of human thought and feeling (again the great cleavages) are apparent once more. From the exquisite recognition of Gloucester and the beautiful moment when it is Patience that Lear sees as the great requirement of human beings in their human situation, we swing wildly to the fantasy of mad destructiveness:

Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

Some people tend to see the main tragic import of the play in these mad scenes. This is, I think to get stuck halfway through the play. From this bottom-most point of madness (and madness is not the whole truth about life's bearability

or unbearability) we move upward and outward again: to Cordelia, and to the confrontation of 'these daughters and these sisters.'

Cordelia has heard of her father's treatment and comes with her army to restore both him and the state to sanity once more. In *Macbeth* this upward movement is the final one, but this is not so in *King Lear*. At the end of *Macbeth* Scotland is rescued and Macbeth removed: the play is a kind of divine comedy. In *King Lear*, after Cordelia's return, there is yet to be revealed the full depth of the wound of life.

Cordelia, 'the root of individual and social sanity,' comes back to the rescue of her father and the state. We all know the upshot. Under the magical influence of her freely bestowed love Lear is restored to at least a convalescent goodness. Then the armies join battle. Cordelia is defeated, and both she and her father taken prisoner. Those efficient governmental power-machines, Goneril, Regan and Edmund, are in command. Captive good, as Shakespeare says in his Sonnet, is seen attending Captain Ill.

CORDELIA: We are not the first

Who, with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;
Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown.
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

LEAR: No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Whose loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,

In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.

EDMUND: Take them away.

LEAR: Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The goujeres shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep: we'll see 'em starve first. Come.

EDMUND: Come hither, captain; hark,
Take thou this note; go follow them to prison:
One step I have advanc'd thee; if thou dost
As this instructs thee, thou dost make thy way
To noble fortunes; know thou this, that men
Are as the time is; to be tender-minded
Does not become a sword; thy great employment
Will not bear question; either say thou'lt do't,
Or thrive by other means.

Where do we go now? Where does Shakespeare's thought reach? It extends, I think, to the greatest depth man's mind can peer into.

In the eighteenth century Dr. Johnson couldn't bear Shakespeare's ending of *King Lear*. He honestly preferred the happy ending Nahum Tate provided instead in his version. Virtue, the eighteenth century thought, *ought* to be seen triumphing over evil. Tate's version adjusted Shakespeare so as to give a partisan and happy ending: in Tate's play Cordelia survives and marries Edgar, her champion, and they reign happily ever after over the re-unified kingdom.

The eighteenth century, I think, missed the point of Shakespeare's final vision. If virtue *must* win, then people will wish to be virtuous in order to be on the winning side. And this is to poison the very fountains of self-sacrificial

love at their source. So—almost by accident—Cordelia in Shakespeare's play is found hanged in her condemned cell. Lear enters bearing her in his arms. It is the most moving scene in world literature:

LEAR: Howl, howl, howl, howl! O! you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vaults should crack. She's gone for ever.
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why, then she lives.

KENT: Is this the promis'd end?

EDGAR: Or image of that horror?

ALBANY: Fall and cease?

LEAR: This feather stirs; she lives! if it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

KENT: O, my good master!

LEAR: Prithee, away.

EDGAR: 'Tis noble Kent, your friend.

LEAR: A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!
I might have sav'd her; now, she's gone for ever!
Cordelia, Cordelia! stay a little. Ha!
What is't thou sayst? Her voice was ever soft.
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.
I kill'd the slave that was a hanging thee.

OFFICER: 'Tis true, my lord, he did.

LEAR: Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
I would have made them skip: I am old now,
And these same crosses spoil me. Who are you?
Mine eyes are not o' the best: I'll tell you straight.

KENT: If fortune brag of two she lov'd and hated,
One of them we behold.

LEAR: This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?

KENT: The same,

Your servant Kent. Where is your servant Caius?

LEAR: He's a good fellow, I can tell you that;

He'll strike, and quickly too. He's dead and rotten.

KENT: No; my good lord; I am the very man—

LEAR: I'll see that straight.

KENT: That, from your first of difference and decay,

Have follow'd your sad steps.

LEAR: You are welcome hither.

KENT: Nor no man else; all's cheerless, dark, and deadly:

Your eldest daughters have fordone themselves,

And desperately are dead.

LEAR: Ay, so I think.

ALBANY: He knows not what he says, and vain it is

That we present us to him.

EDGAR: Very bootless.

OFFICER: Edmund is dead, my lord.

ALBANY: That's but a trifle here.

You lords and noble friends, know our intent;

What comfort to this great decay may come

Shall be applied: for us, we will resign,

During the life of this old majesty,

To him our absolute power:— You, to your rights;

With boot and such addition as your honours

Have more than merited. All friends shall taste

The wages of their virtue, and all foes

The cup of their deservings. O! see, see!

LEAR: And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never!

Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,

Look there, look there!

Why *should* a dog have life, or a rat, and Cordelia be

hanged by Edmund and mischance? This is the last great opening of the wound in Shakespeare's *King Lear*: a deeper searching than any of his other moments, and again like them a cleavage point. What is the question? It is, I think, the deepest question of all: What is the good of Good?

And Shakespeare's *King Lear* is the greatest handling of this question because no easy or trivial answer is given. What is given is a tremendous balance of all the potential greatness against all the potential irrelevance of human existence: a release of the sense of value, and a realization of the sense of waste. Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no life at all? Yes, we feel, at the play's end, Death is indeed terrible: but most because it is Cordelia that is dead. . . . And once we have known Cordelia, then what is Death? To know Cordelia fully is to know the heart of the play's vision. You may remember what the un-named Gentleman said about her.

Thou hast one daughter
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.

The Roman Plays

C. J. SISSON

HAVE you ever wondered what led Shakespeare to write his Roman plays? There is perhaps something of an answer to be found in the very first scenes of his greatest Roman play, *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the full flush of the enchantment that Cleopatra wrought upon Antony, a messenger comes from Rome bearing news to Antony in Egypt. Antony puts him aside impatiently. But Cleopatra, triumphant and confident in her power over Antony, urges him to hear the messenger. Next day, indeed, Antony hears his news. And Cleopatra makes a pregnant comment upon the result:

He was disposed to mirth, but on the sudden
A Roman thought hath struck him.

So the conflict emerges between the magic of Egypt and of love, and the grandeur of Rome and of honour, for the possession of a great Roman noble. But I have often thought that in these words we have also something of a clue to Shakespeare himself and to this development of his art.

He too was disposed to mirth, as we may judge from the series of great comedies ending with *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. And then a Roman thought struck him, and he turned to tragedy with the great story of *Julius Cæsar*. It was followed by *Hamlet* and the rest of his tragic masterpieces, three out of seven upon Roman themes, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. He never returned to

a disposition to mirth. I have indeed wondered whether Shakespeare and his friend Ben Jonson had agreed together to bring Rome and its history upon the stage, each after his own fashion. Jonson too turned from comedy to tragedy, and both went to Rome for their subjects. So the two greatest dramatists of the time were both struck by a Roman thought, and sought together to ennoble the stage with tragedy upon high Roman themes.

Has it occurred to you that Shakespeare never makes Rome the setting for one of his comedies? They are set in Venice, in Padua, Mantua, Milan, Messina, but not in Rome. (I do not count *Cymbeline*, in which a few scenes are set in a house in Rome. But it is the Rome of the Grand Tour, with tourists from Britain, France, Spain and Germany. And it was one of Shakespeare's last plays, when he was writing in a new fashion.) I don't think that this is mere accident; it was a deep feeling that Venice or Padua was the right landscape for the romance of Italy, but the grandeur of ancient Rome resided in the Eternal City. Italy was contemporary to Shakespeare, but Rome was history.

Rome had always haunted Shakespeare's imagination, of course. His education was focused upon Latin and upon the history, literature and thought of Rome. This interest emerged in his early Roman tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, an extraordinary play conceived and written before he had found his own feet and was still imitating others. Tragedy, in the fashion of that time, meant blood, horror, and sensation, with dialogue on stilts, inflated and rhetorical. Thrill follows thrill from the beginning of the play to its end, coffins, tombs, executions, bloody swords, rape and mutilation, and finally the ultimate horror of cannibalism.

Titus Andronicus does not present the Rome of authentic history. It is melodrama taken from medieval legend. It

was not the result of a Roman thought taking possession of Shakespeare. This came much later, when the story of Julius Cæsar, master of his world and conqueror of Britain, laid hold of him. In his play, Brutus, who slew Cæsar, spoke of him as 'the foremost man of all this world'. Brutus had greatness too. To Cæsar's friend Antony, who brought Brutus to ruin, he was 'the noblest Roman of them all'. And Brutus, seeing Cassius lying dead, bade farewell to 'the last of all the Romans'. As for Antony, Shakespeare returned to him later, as you know. The grandeur of Rome was manifest in all these men as he saw them in his mind's eye and as he presented them in *Julius Cæsar*.

Shakespeare's portrait of Cæsar has been interpreted as a caricature, a deliberate belittling of the Colossus who bestrode the world. He has indeed been presented so upon the modern stage, as a boastful dotard, epileptic, deaf, the mere ruin of a once great soldier. This may reflect modern political prejudice, of course. And we may also suspect the influence of stage-traditions which make Brutus and Cassius the star parts of the play. But indeed to represent Cæsar thus is to falsify Shakespeare. The quality of Cæsar stands out in the grave certainty of his reply to Cassius in the Capitol.

CÆSAR: I could be well moved, if I were as you;
 If I could pray to move, prayers would move me.
 But I am constant as the northern star,
 Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
 There is no fellow in the firmament.
 The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks,
 They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
 But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
 So in the world; 'tis furnished well with men,
 And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;
 Yet in the number I do know but one
 That unassailable holds on his rank,

Unshaked of motion: and that I am he
Let me a little show it even in this—
That I was constant Cimber should be banished,
And constant do remain to keep him so.

The heroism of Brutus lies in his conflict with the terror of great Cæsar, whom all men feared, more dangerous than danger, whose fall and death were reflected in omens in the skies and confusions in Nature. To make Brutus the murderer of a poor, crippled man of straw is to belittle Brutus and to alienate sympathy from him. And it takes away all significance from the gigantic shadow of the dead Cæsar which broods over the play after his death, giving unity to its whole action. When Cæsar is slain, Rome stands aghast, 'as it were doomsday'.

'Let's do it after the high Roman fashion', says Cleopatra when *her* doomsday is upon her. And this is the keynote of *Julius Cæsar* as Shakespeare conceived and wrote it, mindful of the dignity of Rome. It is the most classical of his plays. His writing marches here with the measured tread of the Roman legion, as we may hear it at the end of the great scene of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in camp at Sardis.

CASSIUS: Come Antony, and young Octavius come,
Revenge yourselves alone on Cassius,
For Cassius is aweary of the world:
Hated by one he loves, braved by his brother,
Checked like a bondman, all his faults observed,
Set in a notebook, learned, and conned by rote,
To cast into my teeth. O I could weep
My spirit from mine eyes. There is my dagger,
And here my naked breast; within, a heart
Dearer than Pluto's mine, richer than gold.
If that thou beest a Roman, take it forth.
I that denied thee gold, will give my heart.

Strike as thou didst at Cæsar. For I know,
When thou didst hate him worst, thou lovedst him better
Than ever thou lovedst Cassius.

BRUTUS: Sheath your dagger.

Be angry when you will, it shall have scope.
Do what you will, dishonour shall be humour.
O Cassius, you are yoked with a lamb
That carries anger as the flint bears fire,
Who much enforced shows a hasty spark,
And straight is cold again.

CASSIUS: Hath Cassius lived

To be but mirth and laughter to his Brutus,
When grief and blood ill-tempered vexeth him?

BRUTUS: When I spoke that, I was ill-tempered too.

CASSIUS: Do you confess so much? Give me your hand.

BRUTUS: And my heart too.

CASSIUS: O Brutus!

BRUTUS: What's the matter?

CASSIUS: Have you not love enough to bear with me
When that rash humour which my mother gave me
Makes me forgetful?

BRUTUS: Yes Cassius, and from henceforth,
When you are over-earnest with your Brutus,
He'll think your mother chides, and leave you so.

What mattered to Shakespeare was the characters of men and women, the conflicts arising out of character, and the interplay of character and fate. We must not interpret *Julius Cæsar* as a political pamphlet against Cæsarism or monarchy. Shakespeare was born and bred in a world which accepted a dread sovereign lord at the head of the State. The story of *Coriolanus* presented a different problem. But it is no less absurd to discuss this play in modern terms as a dramatic treatment of Fascist principles. England had seen the Earl of Essex, a great noble and a great soldier, in revolt against

his Queen, who stood for the State. No question of abstract principle was involved. It was a conflict between an individual and the State. So in Shakespeare's play *Marcius Coriolanus*, a Roman patrician, the spearhead of Rome's armies, and the saviour of Rome on the field of battle, is in all things governed by his sense of personal honour, by an integrity of character of which he alone is sole judge. This is the key to his conflict with the Rome of patricians, plebeians and tribunes, a conflict in which he was incapable of compromise.

We see him sometimes through the eyes of Menenius, a character whom Shakespeare introduces to comment upon the motives and the expediencies of political life. He is a patrician, and a bluff and honest soul observing a world of state-craft. But he does not stand for Rome, as Elizabeth stood for England. Who then *does* stand for Rome in this play? Certainly not the Tribunes of the People. Theirs is the only evil influence in the conflict between two forces for both of which Shakespeare clearly has sympathy, for *Coriolanus*, the man of action and of honour, as for the just grievances of the people. In this conflict of two rights, the influence of the Tribunes alone makes a tragic ending inevitable.

By a stroke of genius, Shakespeare presented a Rome incarnate in the person of *Volumnia*, who had claims upon *Coriolanus* superior even to the claims of honour. She is his mother. She stands also for Mother Rome, *Roma Eterna*, to whom all Romans owe allegiance and obedience. Thus, and no otherwise, can Rome overcome *Coriolanus*; not by conquest, but by his own submission. *Volumnia's* 'first son', as she calls him, obeys the voice of Rome, though that obedience brings him to his death, as he foresaw in the very act of obeying.

CORIOLANUS: O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome.
But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come. . . .

Ladies, you deserve

To have a temple built you. All the swords
In Italy, and her confederate arms,
Could not have made this peace.

And so to *Antony and Cleopatra*, from the great city of Rome to a vision of the wider world of the Roman Empire, with the shadow of Rome falling over Asia and Africa, pawns in the deadly game played for power by Cæsar's successors, above all between young Octavius, Cæsar's nephew, and Antony, Cæsar's friend and his avenger. No one who recalled Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* could doubt the outcome of such a conflict. Already in that play the calm certainty of Cæsar is reborn in his nephew, ruthless, cold, sure of himself, unmoved by passion, brushing Antony aside:

I do not cross you; but I will do so.

In a sense, the spirit of Cæsar now faces Antony as it once haunted Brutus in his camp at Sardis.

The division of the Empire between Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus allotted Egypt to Antony. And for Antony, alone of the three, there was disaster in the impact of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, with her beauty and the fire and plenitude of her personality. The soldier of Rome becomes the lover of Cleopatra, and the drama of Roman history merges into one of the world's great love-stories, in which the marchings and counter-marchings of East and West are

reflected not only in armies but in the hearts and minds of men and women too. When the glamour of his enchantment is upon him, Antony glories in the chains of his love for Egypt's Queen. Rome and its Empire sink into insignificance beside this love of two great souls.

ANTONY: Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus—when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind
On pain of punishment the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

'Love still has something of the sea'—so the poet Sir Charles Sedley wrote. The nature of Cleopatra, mistress of love, is mirrored in the dark Mediterranean sea that lay between Egypt and Rome, changeable, incalculable, now shining in rippling iridescence, and of a sudden torn by violent winds, passionate and dangerous. Cleopatra's goddess is Isis, goddess of love and of the changing moon. She is of the sea and of the moon that sways its motion in that infinite variety which age could not wither nor custom stale, as Antony's close friend Enobarbus said of her. And therefore, as he thought, Antony could never leave her.

But the hand of Rome stretched across the sea to Alexandria to touch Antony and beckon him from Cleopatra's palace back to Rome. There was danger to the Roman state of which he was one of the three pillars. And his wife Fulvia was dead. Battle was now joined between Rome and Egypt in the heart and soul of Antony. Wisdom, honour, and the pride of the soldier fight on one side, and on the other only love and enchantment, as none saw more clearly than Antony himself. It is astonishing indeed how plainly both the great

protagonists in this drama face the issue with open eyes. 'A Roman thought hath struck him', says Cleopatra. 'These strong Egyptian fetters I must break', says Antony. His uneasy peace with Octavius is buttressed by his marriage in Rome with Octavia, sister of the young Cæsar. And now any return to Cleopatra turns the battle into a battle to the death. The fatal words are spoken by Antony:

I will to Egypt,
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
'I th' East my pleasure lies.

And there, in the East, the final campaign is fought, with Cæsar the inevitable victor. It is in this disaster that Antony, the great General, and Cleopatra, the Queen of Ptolemy's royal line, come to their fullest stature. Their stormy seas fall into brooding serenity. Their hot quarrels are over. Cleopatra's cowardly treachery in war is forgotten. The infinite variety of her moods is closed in the constancy of a great heart that no moon-goddess can now shake, and no mortal Cæsar can defeat. The conflict between love and honour for the possession of Antony is strangely reconciled. Antony finds honour in truth to himself, not to Rome, in this fulfilment of two noble souls. For such a theme the full symphonic orchestra of imaginative poetry is required, beyond the soberer measures of *Julius Cæsar*. This is romantic tragedy in its full stature. So we may well see in the great scene of Antony's death, wounded by his own hand, and now lifted up into Cleopatra's monument where she awaits him, with her women, Iras and Charmian:

CLEOPATRA: O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in. Darkling stand
The varying shore o' th' world. O Antony,
Antony, Antony! Help, Charmian; help, Iras, help.
Help, friends below. Let's draw him hither.

ANTONY:

Peace!

Not Cæsar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumphed on itself.

CLEOPATRA: So it should be, that none but Antony
Should conquer Antony, but woe 'tis so!

ANTONY: I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

CLEOPATRA:

I dare not dear,

Dear my lord pardon, I dare not,
Lest I be taken. Not th' imperious show
Of the full-fortuned Cæsar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me. If knives, drugs, serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe.
Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes,
And still conclusion, shall acquire no honour
Demuring upon me. But come, come Antony—
Help me my women—we must draw thee up.
Assist, good friends.

ANTONY:

O quick, or I am gone.

CLEOPATRA: Here's sport indeed. How heavy weighs my
lord!

Our strength is all gone into heaviness;
That makes the weight. Had I great Juno's power,
The strong-winged Mercury should fetch thee up,
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little.
Wishers were ever fools. O come, come, come.—
And welcome, welcome. Die where thou hast lived.
Quicken with kissing: had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.

ANTONY: I am dying, Egypt, dying.

Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

CLEOPATRA: No, let me speak, and let me rail so high,
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provoked by my offence.

ANTONY: One word, sweet Queen.
Of Cæsar seek your honour, with your safety. O!

CLEOPATRA: They do not go together.

ANTONY: Gentle, hear me,
None about Cæsar trust, but Proculeius.

CLEOPATRA: My resolution, and my hands, I'll trust.
None about Cæsar.

ANTONY: The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I lived, the greatest prince o' th' world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman—a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished. Now my spirit is going,
I can no more.

CLEOPATRA: Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? O see, my women,
The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!
O withered is the garland of the war,
The soldiers' pole is fall'n: young boys and girls
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

Cleopatra is the Hamlet among Shakespeare's women characters, the most complex, incomparably the greatest in stature, and the most diversely interpreted. She is the ultimate test for a Shakespearean actress, as is Hamlet for an actor. She alone among Shakespeare's women dominates a whole play, which rises and falls with her presence or absence. Cleopatra opens the great love-duet of this play. And she closes it upon her royal death with the name of Antony

upon her lips. As she takes the deadly serpents to her bosom, Iras falls dead, heart-broken. Truly, there is heart-break in this closing scene. But there is exaltation too, as befits high tragedy.

CLEOPATRA: Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act. I hear him mock
The luck of Cæsar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come.
Now to that name my courage prove my title.
I am fire and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. So, have you done?
Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips.
Farewell kind Charmian—Iras, long farewell.
Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?
If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired. Dost thou lie still?
If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

CHARMIAN: Dissolve thick cloud, and rain, that I may say
The gods themselves do weep.

CLEOPATRA: This proves me base.

If she first meet the curled Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
Which is my heaven to have. Come thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
Be angry and dispatch. O couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Cæsar ass,
Unpoliced.

CHARMIAN: O eastern star!

CLEOPATRA: Peace, peace.

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

CHARMIAN: O break! O break!

CLEOPATRA: As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle—

O Antony!—Nay I will take thee too.—

What should I stay—

CHARMIAN: In this vile world? So fare thee well.

Now boast thee death, in thy possession lies

A lass unparalleled. Downy windows close,

And golden Phœbus never be beheld

Of eyes again so royal. Your crown's awry,

I'll mend it, and then play—

Shakespeare, too, it may seem, like his creatures Antony and Cleopatra, has triumphed over Rome and the Roman thought, in the assertion of the things of the spirit which are more eternal than the Eternal City.

The Last Plays

BONAMY DOBRÉE

SHAKESPEARE, we believe, retired to Stratford in about 1608, having written his great tragic dramas. It looks as though he then said to himself that he must have more room in which to put over what he had come to think about life. How could he hand on what his pondered experience had told him? He had worked out of himself his profound sense of tragedy, so he didn't want tragedy at all—nor comedy—but something that would give him a chance to handle life as a whole, all its fascinating mixture of grandeur and triviality, its mystery. He made up his mind that he'd write as he liked. He even a little mocked the stage conventions of his time, and sometimes seems to be whispering behind his hand to the audience, 'Of course we all know this is only a play, not real life, with its tiresome limitations', cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, he might have said.

And so—at any rate that is one way of looking at it—he wrote off the magic group of almost final plays that we often call The Romances. It doesn't much matter how the idea of using this wide-ranging type of story came to him. It might have been from the popularity of Sidney's *Arcadia*; it might have been from the applause given Beaumont and Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*. What does matter, what we can't help noticing, is how all these plays run in the same pattern. Take that astonishing fantasia *Pericles*, those two great symphonies *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, and

finally *The Tempest*, exquisite chamber-music. They're all alike as regards the kind of story they tell. The intuitions they're made up of are the same, and so is the final state of being they throw us into.

In all of them we get someone who is lost—and found again: not always as the main story, but as an essential part of the story. And that someone is important, because unless he or she is found, a royal line is brought to an end. In all four plays the agonized tangles are smoothed out through recognition of the people believed lost, through reconciliation, redemption, and finally regeneration, the regeneration of the old through their children. In *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* we have what amounts to a resurrection, a return from death. In all of them life has been horribly broken up, made negative and sterile, but now it moves on, renewed, healthy, fecund. The cruel wrongs are melted away in forgiveness. This forgiveness isn't just a forgetting of injuries, but a diffusion of Christian Charity, an all-understanding love. I don't think that Shakespeare was deliberately teaching Christianity. There's plenty of Christian reference, but how could there not be? In these plays Shakespeare was expressing his deepest religious reactions—and by that I mean his profoundest apprehensions of life—and couldn't help using Christian terms. After all, he belonged to a Christian country; he had been brought up on the Bible: so its ideas, its familiar phrases, would naturally occur to him.

One needn't pretend that the themes governing the Romances are all of them new in Shakespeare. What is *King Lear* about but loss, reconciliation, and redemption? The destructive jealousy of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* exaggerates Othello's. The pastoral scenes, with all their implied town-country opposition, echo *As You Like It*.

You'll hit on lots of other parallels. But in the final plays the themes I've mentioned are made the hub about which the whole cycle of action revolves. And over all the Romances, binding the themes together, there hovers a Providence, all-directing, all-wise—if, one must confess, rather baffling.

But I'm sure it would be utterly wrong to think of these plays as serene. Look at them only for a moment; you'll be bound to agree that they're far from that. The old theory of Shakespeare being 'in the depths' when he wrote the magnificent tragedies—if they do betray a neurosis, it's a neurosis of strength—and 'on the heights' when creating the final plays simply doesn't work out. It's founded, I would say, both on a false psychology, and, to put it mildly, inattentive reading. We're given a vivid realisation of the horror latent in life in all this group. Think only of the brothel scenes in *Pericles*; imagine the loathesomeness of Cloten and the Queen in *Cymbeline*, and the criminal levity of Posthumus; realise for a moment the hideous fury of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. As for *The Tempest*, what is Caliban for?

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture will never stick.

Or the murderous treachery of Antonio and Sebastian? Treachery! the blackest of crimes. The first two plays are full of it. Woven into the Romances is the ineradicable evil in life, which shocks us into realising how perilous the human condition is.

None of these plays is a bit realistic. They become less and less so till we come to the supreme fantasy of *The Tempest*. I'm not saying that there isn't plenty of acute, even brutal realism in them; what I *am* saying is that we're not invited to move about in the ordinary world that we

PROSPERO: Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Well then, we are forced to think that these plays are, at least in some degree, symbolic. They're all the more spiritually real for that. But there's very little direct symbolism. It's true that all except *Cymbeline* give us a terrific storm, implying chaos, moral disruption; and the final healing is brought about by the harmonising power of music. In *Pericles* it's even 'the music of the spheres', though Prospero requires at least 'heavenly music'.

But even if we argue that these plays really are symbolic, we must be careful not to over-interpret them, read into them all sorts of things that probably aren't there. All the same, isn't it rather odd that now Shakespeare should reveal so little real interest in character as such, so little curiosity? There are admirable portraits, as of Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, at once virago and priestess; but there's no development of character. Anyway, there's no time for this in *The Tempest*. Instead, there's conversion, a rebirth of people into new moulds. I freely admit that there are dozens of brilliant strokes of characterization. As one example, take the traditional old shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* telling his half-idiotic son, 'We must be gentle now that we are gentlemen.' Strokes like that only enhance the illusion of richly-

drawn type-characters. You can see how it works. Each play contains the faithful, rather elderly servitor, who has perhaps been wronged: Helicanus in *Pericles*, Belisarius in *Cymbeline*, Camillo in *The Winter's Tale*; and in *The Tempest*, the good old lord Gonzalo. They stand for what you might call the normal decent person. In the same way the leading young women, Marina, Imogen, Perdita, armed with the brave courage of youth, represent chastity, and faith in love, Miranda naïf innocence. We're duly given the obvious villains, the careless fools, or else monumental creations. 'Character is destiny', perhaps; but we feel that Shakespeare was getting on to something else, into a realm where that saying no longer had any point. What he is now doing is to muse over the interweaving of good and evil, and how, in the scheme of things, they're caught up in a net beyond either.

Apart from all that, how rapid and swaying the movement of the plays is! In his wide, free treatment, Shakespeare carries us along at varying speeds, at different levels of response, physical or spiritual. We dally happily in superficialities, we're plunged into stark horror, we follow with eager hope, are dazzled with beauty, or moved to pity. And then the comic element, touching another part of our being. Sometimes grim comedy, as with the gaolers in *Cymbeline*, or laughter-producing, as when Autolycus robs the clown in *The Winter's Tale*, or farcical with Trinculo and Stephano in *The Tempest*. We're rushed through the whole range of emotions. Shakespeare seems to—what shall I say?—sport with us, till he frees us finally in a kind of exalted relief. We too are redeemed; and, as *Pericles* might put it, we thank the gods for life as loud as thunder threatens us.

But let's look at the movement. See what happens in *The Winter's Tale*. It opens smoothly, in an atmosphere of

friendship and contented domesticity. Then, suddenly, we're jolted into facing the madness of jealousy—literally a madness—that seizes upon Leontes. He's without warning plunged into a stinking trough of jealousy. Just listen to him as Polixenes and Hermione go out, and he raves before his son Mamillius.

LEONTES:

Gone already!

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!
 Go, play, boy, play; thy mother plays, and I
 Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
 Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour
 Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play. There have been
 Or I am much deceiv'd, cuckolds ere now:
 And many a man there is, even at this present,
 Now, while I speak this, holds his wife by the arm,
 That little thinks she has been sluic'd in's absence
 And his pond fished by his next neighbour, by
 Sir Smile, his neighbour: nay, there's comfort in't,
 While other men have gates and those gates open'd,
 As mine, against their will. Should all despair
 That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
 Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none:
 It is a bawdy planet, that will strike
 Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful, think it,
 From east, west, north and south: be it concluded,
 No barricado for a belly; know't;
 It will let in and out the enemy
 With bag and baggage: many thousands on's
 Have the disease, and feel't not. How now, boy!

'Have the disease, and feel't not!' He bursts out later into:

LEONTES:

There may be in the cup

A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,
 And yet partake no venom; for his knowledge
 Is not infected: but if one present

The abhorr'd ingredient to his eye, make known
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.

I'm going to leave my theme for the moment. I want to make the point, though it hardly needs making, of Shakespeare's magnificent handling of verse in these plays, the variety of his imagery, and with what wonderful surety he chose his words. Brutal in what you've just heard; but not long after we get such different language as Paulina's to Leontes:

PAULINA: A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert.

Then in the next act he showers us with the lovely lyricism to which I shall come back at the end of my talk. Most of the songs, by the way, that are everybody's favourites occur in this group. Here, more than ever before, Shakespeare shows himself monarch of verse, master of the word. But to return to the movement of *The Winter's Tale*; and by movement, I mean what goes on in us.

After Leontes' outburst, we're caught up in the rush of Polixenes and Camillo fleeing from Sicily, rapid-moving scenes, not static ones now. Then our emotions are differently worked on by news of the birth of Perdita, and the abominable order Leontes gives to have her exposed where the kites and ravens may be her nurses. Momentary relief comes when the envoys to the Oracle return; in the trial scene we're battered till Leontes blasphemes the Oracle and is immediately punished by the death of his son. His too-late repentance is made poignant—to us—by the news of the supposed death of Hermione, the last torturing stab.

Then we are taken to the saving scene of the finding of the babe by the shepherd, and the semi-horrible, semi-comic episode of Antigonus being dined-off by a bear—with, in the background, the symbolic raging of the storm. Time, as chorus, stops the action; then, after a comic Autolycus-Clown interlude, we're invited to the enchanting pastoral sheep-shearing festival. This isn't in Bohemia at all, but in Shakespeare's native Warwickshire, where linen white as driven snow is hung up to dry on the hedges, and tempt the pilfering fingers of Autolycus, that attractive, tuneful rascal. It's the adagio of the symphony. Then the breaking of the idyll, moments of suspense, a brief crisis; finally—binding all our feelings together, the radiance of the reconciliation, the redeeming of Leontes, the coming back into life of Hermione, the statue that proves warm, alive, and loving. That which was lost is found. The rhythm of life, hideously jangled, goes on once again, in all its abundance; and the gods, from their sacred vials, are going to pour their graces on Perdita's head.

For me—but I know that I'm a little heretical in this—*The Winter's Tale* is the richest statement of the intuitions that I mentioned earlier—forgiveness, redemption, regeneration. And with them there is mingled the dancing delight of the loveliness of the moment. *The Tempest*, I admit, is miraculous, a shimmering, iridescent thing. But doesn't it seem to you that in that play the major intuitions are a bit dead? Well, not so much dead, perhaps, as taken for granted. What it looks like to me is that Shakespeare, having clothed them in flesh, had worked them out of his blood. He was moving on to other, even more radically momentous questions. In fact grappling with more abstract notions, equally fundamental to living. Fate and freedom, for example—and he doesn't completely harmonize them. More especially,

'What is reality?' His thoughts about that come out most plainly in that speech of Prospero's you've already heard. All the same, the link with the other plays is there, forgiveness, in the first place. But is it quite of the same generous quality as in the earlier plays? And doesn't it seem to you rather queer that it's Ariel who has to remind Prospero that forgiveness is an essentially human grace? But let's have the scene where Prospero, rather a harsh person by nature, consents to forgive, and then decides to abandon the role of magician, and become a humane human being. Ariel is telling Prospero what he has done with the King of Naples and his followers:

ARIEL: The good old lord Gonzalo;
His tears run down his beard, like winter's drops
From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.

PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL: Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO: And mind shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. Go, release them Ariel.
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
And they shall be themselves.

ARIEL: I'll fetch them, sir.

PROSPERO: Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,

And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back: you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites: and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew, by whose aid—
Weak masters though ye be—I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war. To the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt. The strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar. Graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have required
Some heavenly music—which even now I do—
To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

Full of amazement as *The Tempest* is, I'm eager to end this talk with a large ration of the entrancing festival scene in *The Winter's Tale*. There we're given, with both full hands, the beneficent flow of life, joy in nature and all its plenitude, flanked by the joyous villainy of Autolycus. You'll remember that Florizel, Prince of Bohemia, passes incognito among the shepherds as Doricles, though Perdita knows who he is. King Polixenes and Camillo come in disguised, to attend on the most perfect love-scene that Shakespeare ever wrote, and listen to his most glorious flower-pieces. It's over-

flowing with the life-giving creative process, mirrored in what has been called Perdita's 'Innocent sensuality'. The whole, which feels like Spring, though set in the late summer, breathes the spirit of 'great creative nature'. The scene is introduced by the old shepherd, Perdita's supposed father.

SHEPHERD: Fie daughter, when my old wife lived, upon
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook,
Both dame and servant; welcomed all; served all;
Would sing her song and dance her turn; now here,
At upper end o' th' table, now i' th' middle;
On his shoulder, and his; her face o' fire
With labour, and the thing she took to quench it
She would to each one sip. You are retired,
As if you were a feasted one, and not
The hostess of the meeting. Pray you bid
These unknown friends to's welcome, for it is
A way to make us better friends, more known.
Come, quench your blushes, and present yourself
That which you are, mistress o' the feast. Come on,
And bid us welcome to your sheep-shearing,
As your good flock shall prosper.

PERDITA: Sir, welcome.

It is my father's will, I should take on me
The hostess-ship o' the day. You're welcome sir.
Give me those flowers there Dorcas. Reverend sirs,
For you, there's rosemary, and rue; these keep
Seeming and savour all the winter long.
Grace and remembrance be to you both,
And welcome to our shearing.

POLIXENES: Shepherdess—

A fair one are you—well you fit our ages
With flowers of winter.

PERDITA: Sir, the year growing ancient,
Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o' th' season

Are our carnations, and streaked gillyvors,
Which some call nature's bastards. Of that kind
Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not
To get slips of them.

POLIXENES: Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?

PERDITA: For I have heard it said,
There is an art, which in their piedness shares
With great creating nature.

POLIXENES: Say there be.
Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean; so over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather; but
The art itself is nature.

PERDITA: So it is.

POLIXENES: Then make your garden rich in gillyvors,
And do not call them bastards.

PERDITA : I'll not put
The dibble in earth, to set one slip of them;
No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore
Desire to breed by me. Here's flowers for you;
Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram,
The marigold, that goes to bed wi' th' sun,
And with him rises, weeping. These are flowers
Of middle summer, and I think they are given
To men of middle age. Y'are very welcome.

CAMILLO: I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing.

PERDITA: Out alas!
You'd be so lean, that blasts of January

Would blow you through and through. Now my fair'st friend,

I would I had some flowers o' th' spring that might
Become your time of day; and yours, and yours,
That wear upon your virgin branches yet
Your maidenheads growing. O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that frightened thou let'st fall
From Dis's wagon; daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength—a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown-imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one. O, these I lack,
To make you garlands of; and my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er, and o'er.

FLORIZEL:

What, like a corse?

PERDITA: No, like a bank, for love to lie and play on;
Not like a corse; or if—not to be buried,
But quick, and in mine arms. Come, take your flowers,
Methinks I play as I have seen them do
In Whitsun pastorals. Sure, this robe of mine
Does change my disposition.

FLORIZEL:

What you do,

Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever. When you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so; so give alms;
Pray so; and for the ordering your affairs,
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move still, still so,
And own no other function. Each your doing,
So singular, in each particular,

Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
That all your acts are queens.

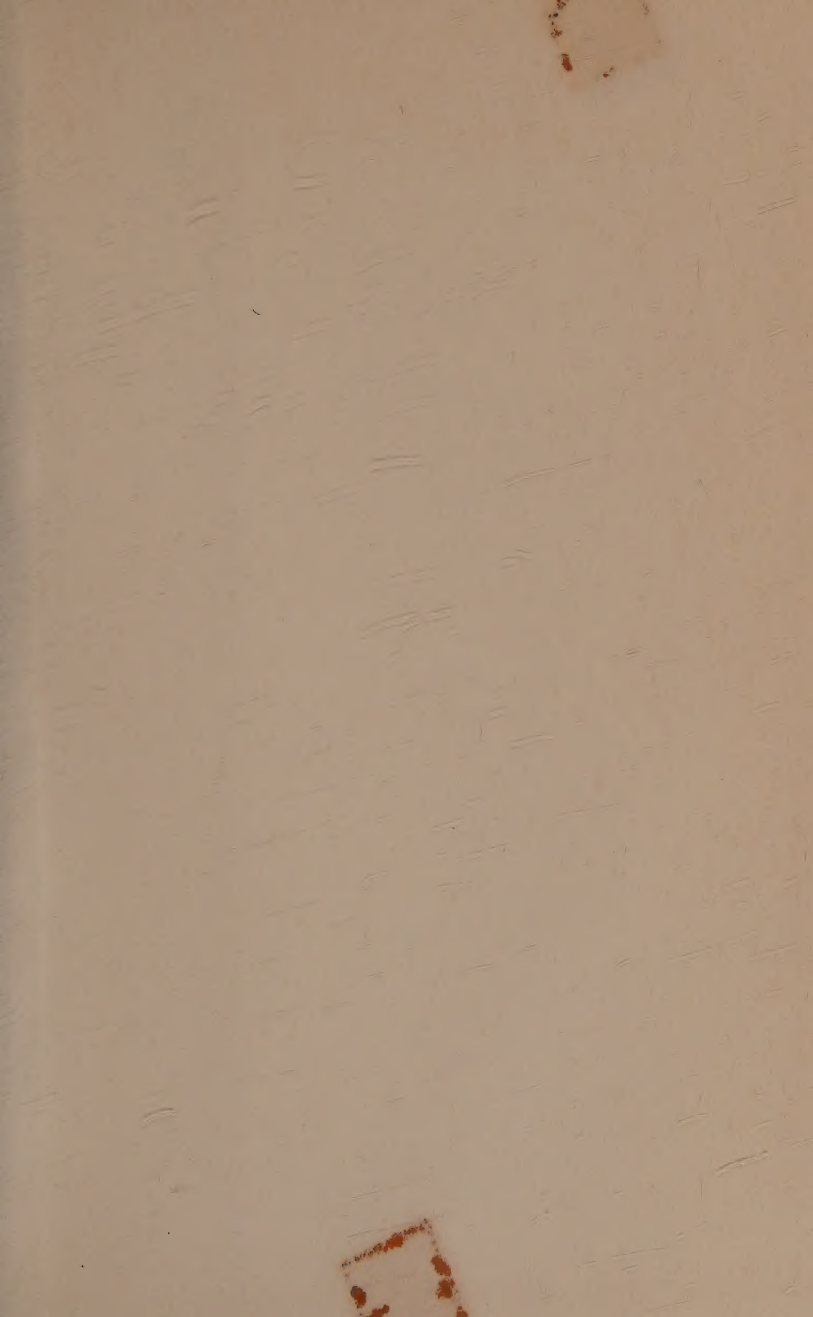
PERDITA: O Doricles,
Your praises are too large. But that your youth,
And the true blood which peeps fairly through't,
Do plainly give you out an unstained shepherd,
With wisdom I might fear, my Doricles,
You wooed me the false way.

FLORIZEL: I think you have
As little skill to fear, as I have purpose
To put you to't. But come, our dance I pray.
Your hand, my Perdita; so turtles pair
That never mean to part.

PERDITA: I'll swear for 'em.

POLIXENES: This is the prettiest low-born lass, that ever
Ran on the green-sward. Nothing she does, or seems,
But smacks of something greater than herself,
Too noble for this place.

CAMILLO: He tells her something
That makes her blood look on't. Good sooth she is
The queen of curds and cream.





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The Players'

EDITED BY J. H. WALTER

THIS new series of Shakespeare editions have been planned with school pupils particularly in mind, and will be found very useful for examination purposes, but the emphasis on the dramatic approach will recommend the series to those who want to buy sets of the plays for stage production.

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JULIUS CAESAR

MACBETH
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
AS YOU LIKE IT
THE TEMPEST
HENRY V
ROMEO AND JULIET

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